

उत्तिष्ठत  
जाग्रत  
प्राप्य  
वरान्निबोधत



# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

ARISE! AWAKE! AND STOP NOT TILL THE GOAL IS REACHED

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## VEDIC PRAYERS

ऋतं दिवे तदवोचं पृथिव्या  
अभिश्वावाय प्रथमं सुमेधाः ।  
पातामवद्यादुरितादभीके  
पिता माता च रक्षतामवोभिः ॥

—Rg Veda, 1.185.10

I, an unawakened intellect, sing glorious hymns in praise of heaven and earth in order to please them and also make everyone around listen to them. May the heaven, who is like the protective father, and the earth, which like a mother produces food for us, destroy our sins, remove darkness, bring light, and keep us near them always and protect us.

इदं द्यावापृथिवी सत्यमस्तु  
पितृमर्त्यदिहोब्रुवे वां ।  
भूतं देवानामवसे अवोभिः  
विद्यामेषं वृजनं जीरदानुं ॥

—Rg Veda, 1.185.11

O Dyāvā Pr̥thivī! May our hymns become fruitful. O Mother Earth! O Father Heaven! May the hymns we sing in your praise in our sacrifices become fruitful. May the gods come and reside near us. May we attain plenty of food, wealth and a long life.

# Kumbha Melā and the Media

## EDITORIAL

### *The Kumbha Melā Ended Peacefully*

To the great relief of one and all, the greatest Hindu religious congregation, the Kumbha Melā, passed off peacefully. No man-made disasters, no natural calamities. Millions of people came, took part in it, became blessed, and returned home in peace and joy. An unexpected number of devotees attended the Kumbha Melā this time. The Kumbha Melā management was stunned at the unique response: at least 50 million people attended the Melā on the holy *maunī amāvāsyā* day! The authorities simply didn't know how to cope with the sea of humanity, but cope with they did, to the satisfaction of one and all. In spite of all the rush and struggle, there was no trouble anywhere. Someone remarked: 'Even small *pūjā* pandals can't organize things in such an elegant manner.' Rightly said. The earth's greatest spiritual gathering of human beings thus came to an end in a grand, grand way. Despite this success, all wasn't milk and honey for Kumbha Melā: there was the media.

### *What the Media Said*

Perhaps some of our readers couldn't attend the Kumbha Melā, and had to be satisfied with television news and media reports only. We hear a few TV channels showed much of the Kumbha Melā. We also hear that some sections of the media gave favourable reports of the event. Thanks to them. But not all sections of the press were kind: there were terrible pictures and comments.

The main concern of the media is improving sales. And in order to sell, they can go to any extent. That's what many did with regard to the Kumbha Melā news also. They printed offensive and sometimes doubtful pictures, and published derogatory reports, comments, and even editorials. They saw only politics, indecency, etc, in the Kumbha Melā too.

Hindus are traditionally disunited. We are an easy prey to criticism. Any Tom, Dick and Harry can write or speak ill of us, all right. If Hinduism is criticized, let alone others, many Hindus themselves enjoy it. They are happy if our sadhus are criticized, if our religion is censured and if our practices are maligned! Those reporters and press people—who malign Hindu gods and goddesses, our saints and celebrations—who are they? They too are Hindus alone, but with a difference. They are modern people, chiefly given to drinking, dancing, and enjoying life. To their ultra-modern eyes, the ancient religion appears to be full of weakness. And so they write whatever they can against this ancient religion. But let them say a word against some other religions! They don't dare do that. They are scared of the consequences. Does that mean that the oldest religion on earth, **Hinduism**, alone has all that is bad and other religions and their followers are jewels? In the name of broadness, in the name of the so-called anti-fundamentalism and secularism, we Hindus have degraded ourselves to such an extent that we enjoy reading silly criticisms about our own *sanātana dharma*!

The *Organiser* (27 November 2000—3 December 2000 issue) carried a pictorial report titled 'Indian Gods on US Toilet Seats.' Sittin's Pretty Designs, a Seattle-based firm, started selling toilet seats with large pictures of Ganeśa, Kālī and other gods and goddesses pasted on them. Deities on toilet seats! We don't do that to our worst enemies, do we?

### *Weakness is not Broadness*

In the name of broadness, we Hindus needn't have to be so meek and subdued. First of all let us know what our religion is, how great its ideals are, and then practise them. Apart from the glorious works of Swami



Vivekananda, there are several good books available on Hinduism, like Swami Nirvedananda's *Hinduism at a Glance*, D.S. Sharma's *Hinduism Through Questions and Answers*, and the latest book, Gavin Flood's *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Let's read and understand the basics of this religion. A proper understanding and a little practice are in themselves a strong protest. But let's be bold to say no to criticism too. Why should we be weak? When two missionaries went on criticizing Hindu religion before Swami Vivekananda on board a ship, Swamiji caught hold of them and said: 'One more word, and I shall throw both of you overboard.' Seeing his strong physique, the missionaries must have understood what he meant, and became silent.

Why can't we be bold? Swami Vivekananda repeatedly stressed boldness. Boldness isn't arrogance, but correct depiction of strength. What a single individual of some newspaper writes isn't the whole of truth. Let's use our judgement and discretion. When you protest something wrong done to your religion, you don't become a fanatic or a fundamentalist: such ideas are all the creation of the media. 'Secularism' is a much-abused word now. If Christians or Muslims protest something wrong done or said against their respective religions (even imaginary sometimes!), it is treated with immense sympathy. But when it comes to Hinduism, it is called fundamentalism, narrowness, etc. In Kashmir, for instance, so many Hindus are killed, but the media announces it as a passing event. But see the hype when someone from other religions is killed. Haj pilgrims get subsidy; can Hindus dream of such privileges? Why this discrimination? Because Hindus are weak and disunited. Meekness and humility are good qualities, but weakness and disunity are not.

Furthermore, whether it's the Kumbha Melā photographs or others, please accept them with a pinch of salt when it comes to the media. This is the computer and supertechnology age, mind you, and please know that the computer is a genius. The photographs which

the media published were all that the millions could get to witness of the great event. But there were singing, discourses, thousands participating in mass devotional practices, free feeding, lectures, decorated pandals, etc too. Why, the press saw only politics, a monk or a nun smoking ganja (as they press said!), or an old monk speaking on a cellphone (perhaps given by the reporter himself to him, to mock monasticism!). When we told a doctor that we were going to the Kumbha Melā, the doctor said: 'Oh, what's there in the Kumbha Melā? Monks and nuns smoking ganja.'

Hinduism is the broadest religion with the widest scope and the greatest promise to everyone down to the weakest sinner, and this religion alone has discovered the truth of the Ātman. The treasures this religion contains are simply immense. We don't say that there are no black sheep in Hinduism; there might be some here and there to fill their stomach. But this black sheep phenomenon is universal! Yet, it's this sacred religion alone that is targeted by the ultra-modern! Let's now see what exactly took place at the Kumbha Melā.

### *India Lives in the Villages*

Swami Vivekananda had remarked that India lives in the villages. Truly enough, the Kumbha Melā showed what the Indian village really is. If at all religion is living today, it is to a great extent in the villages. Millions upon millions of human beings, daring the biting cold and chill weather, carrying what little they possessed at home, walking mile after mile with their families in dust and hunger to the venue of the Kumbha Melā just in order to have a dip was something for the gods to envy. The roads to the Sangam were simply flooded with people who were chanting the holy name of Rama and walking slowly but steadily to have a dip at the sacred confluence. The sky was their roof and the river-bed their home. Their little ovens were fashioned out of sand. They lived there, on the sacred river-bank, under the starlit sky and the sunshine, waiting for the auspicious moment to bathe in the holy confluence of Mothers Gangā, Yamunā and



Sarasvati. And what were they doing all the while? Repeating the name of Rama endlessly! The holy Prayag reverberated with the holy names of God for days at a stretch! Millions of voices sang the name of Rama, and the entire area had a thrilling spiritual atmosphere.

Coming to the beautifully-designed pandals and *akhādās*, there was a continuous singing of hymns and *stotras*, songs and *kīrtanas*, there was the chanting of Vedic hymns, there were discourses and dramas, etc. There were thousands of holy men and women from various orders, their hearts fixed on the Lord and their minds anxious to think of Him, telling the ardent devotees about the Lord's glory in diverse ways. The *maunī amāvāsyā* (24 January) was the greatest day. That day, though over 60 million people had assembled on the Kumbha Melā grounds, and many more were stopped, there was no untoward incident. Because of the crowds and the narrowness of bridges, there was some pushing no doubt. But there was not a grumble anywhere. Instead, even when pushed, people shouted 'Ramachandraji ki jai!' Struggle, yet keep your mind in God—this is the greatness of Hinduism. Then there were many organizations feeding thousands at a time, free of charge. The Nanakpanthis, for instance, were busy serving food to thousands in their *langar-khānās*. Hundreds of non-Indians were seen in the Kumbha Melā area, moving as the Indians do, singing and chanting God's names as the Indians do. In all, it was all a uniquely inspiring event.

Walking along the vast area, you could see old men and women with two sticks to support them, muttering Sri Rama's names and slowly walking towards their destinations. There was a paralysed girl on a wooden seat with wheels, going towards the holy rivers; one wonders how she managed to enter the Melā grounds at all! Then there were little children being carried by their parents, and one always feared as to what would happen to them in case of a stampede—which of course could happen any moment. But nothing happened. The press didn't notice all this!

The police should be lauded for all that they did. They tried their utmost to serve the public. There were exceptions, of course. But they themselves were devotees and when they saw a monk or nun, they would say 'pranam' with respect. They no doubt used their batons in extreme instances of pushing, but it was only to make sound: they would beat the luggage which the devotees carried. Who can control the floods of the sea? All the bridges and barricades stood there to display their inadequacy only, or so it appeared.

Devotion, devotion, and devotion everywhere. When the sadhus went in procession to the bathing ghat, no doubt there was some trouble owing to the huge crowds and some pushing, but thousands of people had sat all night to watch the procession braving the cold. After the sadhus took bath, it was the turn of the devotees. After their bath, when thousands of devotees were returning to their camps or respective places, one could notice immense joy and peace in all their faces. After all, their efforts had been successful: they have been freed from sins by bathing in the holy confluence.

The Ramakrishna Mission camp, organized by the Ramakrishna Math, Allahabad, was a beautiful one—well-organized and well-designed, and the monks served thousands of devotees and monks with great devotion. Bhajans, lectures, etc, were going on incessantly in the pandal, and a religious conference was organized on 28th, in which the *mahants* of many *akhādās* took part.

Attending the Kumbha Melā one understands what power and potential Hinduism has. A little streamlining and organization, and we could do wonders. We also come to know what strong faith the poor villagers—millions of them—have.

### ***The Tragic Earthquake***

While all this was going on at one end, there came the saddest jolt to India—the tragic earthquake, which took the heaviest toll ever. About a hundred thousand have perished they fear, and double the number are injured.



Numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations jumped in to serve the hapless people, while help poured in from abroad. **The Ramakrishna Mission organized extensive primary relief operations to the most affected, which of course is still in full swing. It is also planning a massive secondary relief.**

The question on everyone's lips was: 'Why do such sad things happen?' Just when India is about to raise its head, some natural calamity strikes it, and there is disaster. Why? This is a question only for the gods to answer. But from our humble human end, we can do what we can. Let's all pray for the victims of the devastating earthquake, and for those who are still suffering from its after-effects. Let us all do our utmost to serve them. Prayer is a most powerful tool in seeking God's grace. The Kumbha Melā has proved that religion has immense potential. So let's all unitedly pray to the Lord to protect us and to guide us along the right path.

Reports of how people are working round the clock to bring solace to the suffering are coming from all corners of Gujarat and the rest of India. Some sacrifice-stories are thrilling! Since ancient times, our Hindu ideal has been sacrifice and service. We have instances of people sacrificing their own lives for the good of others. This is Hinduism! Swami Vivekananda said:

The eternal, the infinite, the omnipresent, the omniscient is a principle, not a person. You, I, and everyone are but embodiments of that principle...and all in the end will be the perfect embodiment of that and thus all will be one as they are now essentially. **This is all there is of religion, and the practice is through this feeling of oneness that is love.** All old foggy forms are mere old superstitions. Now, why struggle to keep them alive? Why give thirsty people ditch-water to drink whilst the river of life and truth flows by? This is only human selfishness, nothing else. **Life is short—time is flying—that place and people where one's ideas work best should be the country and the people for everyone. Ay, for a dozen bold hearts, large, no-**

**ble, and sincere!** (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 7, p. 499.)

Secondly, let us learn lessons from such tragedies. Let's understand that life is evanescent. Let's understand that we aren't here for all time to come. Let's be prepared. To be prepared means to be in God: to seek Him, love Him, pray to Him constantly, and serve Him in his creation. Let us purify ourselves through prayer, meditation, and selfless service. All that we build and preserve can go in a moment; but that which we do selflessly remains. That is, the effects of our good actions will all remain intact. Let us strive to perform noble actions, without any desire for their fruits, thereby wiping out the effects of our past misdeeds through them. Sacred events like the Kumbha Melā are meant to purify us, to increase our faith in God, to understand how to lead spiritual lives and to seek Him. Says Swamiji:

Rouse yourselves, therefore, for life is short. There are greater works to be done.... What is in this life? You are Hindus, and there is the instinctive belief in you that life is eternal. Sometimes I have young men come and talk to me about atheism; I do not believe a Hindu can become an atheist.... It is not in your blood. You cannot believe what is not in your constitution; it would be a hopeless task for you. Do not attempt that sort of thing. **Life is short, but the soul is immortal and eternal, and one thing being certain, death, let us therefore take up a great ideal and give up our whole life to it.** Let this be our determination, and may He, the Lord, who 'comes again and again for the salvation of His own people,' to quote from our scriptures—may the great Krishna bless us and lead us all to the fulfilment of our aims! (*Complete Works*, Vol. 3, p. 304.)

Any event, good or bad, only reminds us of our spiritual goal in life, about attaining perfection. This human birth, they say, is the most precious gift of God. Let us all strive to attain that through the noble means Swamiji has taught: **'They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.'** □



# IMAGES OF INDIA'S PAST

## The Greatness of Tarabai

Suranath, the ruler of Tonk in the 16th century, was driven out treacherously by Muslim invaders. He took shelter in the Aravali hills. His wife passed away leaving behind a little girl. That girl was Tarabai. Suranath assumed responsibility of his daughter's upbringing, and he did it exceedingly well. Tarabai became a scholar and an adept in martial arts: she was a brave warrior. Suranath would tell her about his native land, Tonk, and about how invaders had driven him out. It became Tarabai's mission in life to drive the aliens away and recapture the kingdom. The first attempt was a failure: Tarabai lost a war. But her fame spread, and the Chitore emperor, Prithviraj, wanted to marry her. Tarabai laid only one condition: 'Drive the aliens out of Tonk, and you shall be my husband.' Prithviraj came with a huge army, and Tarabai assisted him ably. The aliens were driven out. Prithviraj married Tarabai. Soon there was news that King Surajmal of Mewar had joined hands with the aliens and had planned to attack different kingdoms. Tarabai and Prithviraj were invited to help these kingdoms. The couple were enraged at Surajmal's wickedness, and they fell upon him with all their might. Surajmal was subdued and humbled. There was peace. A few days later, there was a letter from Prithviraj's sister, the princess of Sirohi, to help her in her distress. Though Tarabai wanted to accompany her husband, Prithviraj dissuaded her from doing so and went alone with an army. To his surprise, there was no distress at all. His sister fell at his feet and sought pardon. Prithviraj excused her and decided to return the same day to Tonk. Unfortunately, he became a victim of treachery again: the prince of Sirohi fed him with poisoned water and he succumbed to it on the way. The news reached Tarabai. She was enraged. She went with a huge army towards Sirohi to punish the prince. But on the way, seeing her husband's body, all her anger cooled down. She entered her husband's funeral pyre. Thus India lost a fearless and valorous queen (cf. *Kalyāṇ*, 'Nāri Aṅk').

## Hindu Rule in Afghanistan

*The Times of India* (5 January 2001) reports that a stone inscription in Sanskrit has been recovered from the city of Mazar-i-Sharif in northern Afghanistan. Prof Ahmad Hasan Dani, an archaeologist from Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan, who disclosed this news at the Indian History Congress, says that a Hindu king called Veka was ruling those parts of Afghanistan in 959 AD. The earlier Hindu Shahi ruler was Kallar. The stone inscription reads that King Veka constructed a Shiva temple at Maityasya. Prof Dani infers that this Veka Raja must be an ancestor of Veka Deva as the latter's coins are found in Afghanistan, and is mentioned by the Arab ruler Yaqubi. Prof Dani also suggests that Veka should be accepted as an independent ruler of northern Afghanistan. How did the Hindu rule end there? The learned professor feels that possibly Aliptigin conquered them during the 10th century AD.

# Swami Yogananda: Holy Mother's Attendant

## PRAVRAJIKA VIRAJAPRANA

*Pravrajika Virajaprana is a nun of the Convent attached to the Vedanta Society of Northern California, USA. In this remarkable article, based on her talk delivered on Swami Yogananda, Virajapranaji vividly portrays the life of the great monk. This is the concluding part of this complete study of Swami Yogananda.*

**Till Now...** Owing to his tremendous spiritual yearning, Yogin had flatly refused to marry. His mother cried and pleaded with him to marry for her sake. Broken-hearted, he married. After his marriage, Yogin was so ashamed and crestfallen over his predicament that he stopped visiting Sri Ramakrishna completely. Sri Ramakrishna knew that Yogin had married and, having repeatedly sent for him to no avail, finally used the money excuse to shame Yogin into coming. Sri Ramakrishna's accusation was that Yogin had not returned some money to a man from the Kali Temple, who had given Yogin a few coins to purchase some articles for Sri Ramakrishna. It worked. As Yogin approached Sri Ramakrishna, he quickly came forward, saying, 'So what if you have married? Through God's grace hundreds of marriages will never be an obstruction for you.' When Yogin referred to the payment of the balance, Sri Ramakrishna wouldn't even listen to him. A huge weight fell from Yogin's heart. **Please read on...**

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Later, Sri Ramakrishna blessed Yogin's wife; touching her head, he told Yogin that he did not have to worry about her anymore. Yogin understood that Sri Ramakrishna had taken his wife's responsibility, thereby relieving him of it forever. However, the drama doesn't end here. Yogin's detachment and withdrawal from the world were accelerating. One day his mother sharply scolded him, saying, 'If you don't care about making money and getting ahead in the world, why did you get married?' Yogin replied, 'Didn't I tell you that I never wanted to marry. I only agreed because you cried.' 'What do you mean? No

one gets married just because another person wants him to. How could you marry unless you had a *desire* to do so?' Yogin stared at her, totally speechless. For his mother he had renounced renunciation, as it were, and now she was talking like this. The thought crossed his mind that Sri Ramakrishna was the only person he'd ever met whose words and thoughts were in perfect harmony. Thoroughly disgusted with his family situation, Yogin began staying with Sri Ramakrishna for longer periods of time.

Another chapter began for him. From this time on until Sri Ramakrishna's *maha-samadhi*, Yogin was being trained and moulded by Sri Ramakrishna's guiding hand. It was a tremendous education to live with Sri Ramakrishna; his every word and action had deep significance. Yogin found this out when on one occasion the temple officials failed to send *prasad* to the Master's room. Sri Ramakrishna went to the office and raised a big fuss. Yogin was perplexed; he couldn't figure out why Sri Ramakrishna would be so agitated over such a small thing. He was indifferent to food; furthermore, he had a delicate stomach. Then he decided that perhaps the Master still had not overcome some of the tendencies of his priestly class. When Sri Ramakrishna returned, he spontaneously explained to Yogin that Rani Rasmani had bequeathed her estate for a purpose—for serving holy people. He wanted to make sure that the Rani's gift was honoured properly. Sri Ramakrishna was not personally motivated to do anything; he never acted out of self-interest. Yogin realized that



his superficial notion of Sri Ramakrishna's action was mistaken.

Nothing, absolutely nothing, escaped the Master's watchful eye. The rough edges of one's character were sanded until they were perfectly smooth. Worldliness, even in its subtlest form, was eradicated and replaced with a taste of divine bliss. Day and night Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated spirituality through the simple example of his own life. One of the most important lessons Yogin learned took place at night. One evening Yogin spent the night with the Master with the idea of serving him. Being a light sleeper, he woke up in the middle of the night. When he looked around, he noticed that Sri Ramakrishna was not in the room. At first he thought that maybe he was strolling in the garden, but then a terrible suspicion gripped his mind. Had Sri Ramakrishna gone to the *nahabhat* to be with his wife? Could his actions differ from his teachings? Yogin decided to get to the bottom of the situation and as unsavoury as it might seem, he stood in a strategic place so that he could see the *nahabhat* door. As he stood focused on the door, he suddenly heard the slapping sound of Sri Ramakrishna's slippers coming from the side of the Panchavati. You can imagine the state of the young man's mind. As Sri Ramakrishna approached, he called out, 'What are you doing here?' Of course, he knew what Yogin was doing there. Humiliated, embarrassed, covered with confusion, Yogin stood speechless. Sri Ramakrishna understood everything from his facial expression. He praised him, saying that one should test a holy man day and night and then only accept his words as true. Needless to say, Yogin did not sleep the rest of the night. He said later that throughout his life he never forgave himself for what he considered to be a very grave offense of suspecting the immaculate purity of a saint like Sri Ramakrishna.

Sri Ramakrishna always tried to bring a balance in the lives of his disciples. Whatever method was needed to round out a personality, he adopted that. We've seen how Yogin

had been embroiled because of his unusually soft heart. Under duress he lacked the strength to refuse his mother. Sri Ramakrishna hammered away at him to become firm and resolved, and not to yield so easily. Further blows were given to his mild, sensitive nature. In Yogin's case, cockroaches played a part in his character formation. One day when he went to visit the Master, he showed Yogin a cockroach in his box of clothes. Sri Ramakrishna asked him to take the cockroach outside and kill it. Being squeamish, Yogin couldn't bear to kill it, so he took it to the far end of the garden and released it. After some time while he was returning to Sri Ramakrishna's room, he was thinking, 'The Master won't ask about it; he's always absorbed in his own mood. After all, who would remember to ask about a cockroach? Or even if by chance he asks me about it, he'll probably admire my compassion.' As soon as Yogin entered the room, the first thing Sri Ramakrishna said was, 'Did you kill the cockroach?' 'No, sir, I let it go.' Sri Ramakrishna sharply scolded him: 'I told you to kill the cockroach, but you let it go. You should always do *exactly* as I ask *you* to do. Otherwise in more serious matters also you will follow your own judgement and come to grief.' Sri Ramakrishna taught Yogin that one should have implicit faith in the guru's words. Interpretive commentaries were not part of the agenda. Living with and serving Sri Ramakrishna was rarely a 'win win' situation; it was usually a 'lose lose' one as far as the ego was concerned.

On another occasion Yogin was coming to Dakshineswar from Calcutta by boat, when a passenger who overheard that he was going to Dakshineswar started maligning Sri Ramakrishna. Yogin was hurt but kept quiet; he rationalized the man's behaviour figuring the person didn't know Sri Ramakrishna, and furthermore Sri Ramakrishna didn't need his defense. He figured that when he told the Master that he would just laugh, as he was indifferent to others' opinions. But when Yogin told Sri Ramakrishna what happened,



he took it very seriously. 'What, he insulted me and you swallowed it without protesting? Do you know what the scriptures say you should do if someone insults your guru? You should cut off the person's head or leave the place at once. And you didn't even say a word!' In this circumstance Yogin's choice would have been to cut off the person's head or go overboard, but instead he got his own head cut off!

Yogin was proud of his discriminating intelligence and yet he had an unrealistic, naive trust in others. Sri Ramakrishna encouraged seeing the good in everyone, but discouraged believing them blindly. One day he sent Yogin to a shop to purchase a pan. The clerk cheated him outright. Yogin didn't check out the pan before he bought it and when he brought it back, it leaked. Sri Ramakrishna rebuked him for his carelessness. 'Be a devotee, but don't be a fool.' One's mind should always be alert, sharp. Sri Ramakrishna cautioned his disciples about the insidious nature of maya. Allowing oneself to be deceived on any level is dangerous for a spiritual seeker. According to Lord Buddha, *pramāda*, inadvertence, is death.

Once when Sri Ramakrishna, his nephew Ramlal, and Yogin were going to Balaram Bose's house in a carriage, Sri Ramakrishna inquired whether Yogin had brought his cloth and towel. Yogin replied that he had the towel but he had forgotten the cloth. He was sure that Balaram, who was one of the Master's eminent lay disciples, would be happy to give him another one. Sri Ramakrishna became highly annoyed, 'People will say what a hapless fellow has come! It will inconvenience them and they will feel embarrassed. Stop the carriage, go and get the cloth.' Sri Ramakrishna could not tolerate forgetfulness and untidiness, because he felt it reflected the person's state of mind. The mind is an organic whole; therefore unmindfulness in small matters creates a tendency that carries over to more serious matters. He used to tell his disciples, 'My mind is always absorbed in God and I never misplace anything, whereas you do a

little japa and your life falls apart.' It's amazing that although he was unaware of the external world and even his body during samadhi, he was very particular about the details of daily life while in the ordinary plane.

Sri Ramakrishna monitored not only the spiritual practices of his disciples, but their eating, sleeping, and other daily routines and habits. Once he asked Yogin the inconvenient question, 'What do you eat at night?' Now if an ascetic such as Sri Ramakrishna asked you this question, you would probably feel embarrassed, unless of course you are a very dainty eater. Innocently, Yogin replied, 'Bread made from one pound of flour and half a pound of potato curry.' Sri Ramakrishna replied: 'Gracious, I don't need your service. I can't afford to provide such a *large quantity of food* everyday. You better eat at home before you come here.' From then on Yogin changed his eating habits. In fact, he became so austere in years to come that while in Varanasi he would beg a little dry bread, enough for four days or so, then soak it in water and satisfy his hunger with a little bread.

The remarkable thing about many of these stories is that Swami Yogananda told them himself. There was often no one else present when Sri Ramakrishna corrected or advised him. In so doing, the swami has passed on to us for our guidance these invaluable instructions that he had received.

In the middle of 1885 Sri Ramakrishna developed throat cancer; his divine play was drawing to a close. To facilitate his treatment he was shifted to the Cossipore garden house, where Yogin began living so that he could serve the Master full-time. He wholeheartedly served him and simultaneously practised such intense austerities that his own health began to fail. Sri Ramakrishna cautioned him to temper his practice—to eat and rest regularly. Yet another lesson to be learned—if you neglect your health, how can you serve others? Eight or nine days before Sri Ramakrishna passed away, he asked Yogin to bring the almanac and read the celestial events for each day in



August. When Yogin finished reading the entry for 16 August, Sri Ramakrishna asked him to stop reading and put the book away. The Master entered *mahasamadhi* on 16 August 1886.

Swami Vivekananda said once that all of Yogin's shortcomings could be forgiven because of his devoted and dedicated service to Holy Mother. To assuage Holy Mother's grief, Balaram Bose suggested that she go on pilgrimage for a change. The mystics say when a highly evolved soul has been accustomed to the transcendent company of someone of a similar nature, and that rarified atmosphere is severed for some reason, a tremendous void is felt. For years Holy Mother had lived in deep spiritual communion with Sri Ramakrishna and when that was withdrawn, she was overwhelmed. Just two weeks after Sri Ramakrishna's passing away, Yogin began his devoted service to Holy Mother, which spanned thirteen years until his own death in 1899. He had already looked after many of Mother's needs in Dakshineswar but now he moved with her like her shadow. Considering Holy Mother as one with Sri Ramakrishna, he felt that devoted service to her was his highest religion. It is interesting to note that just as Yogin took on the service of the Mother, she also was beginning a new chapter in her life. Until now Mother was virtually hidden from view. The time was coming when she, as Sri Ramakrishna had told her, would have to carry on his mission by assuming the spiritual responsibility of thousands of people, including guiding the young monks of the future Ramakrishna Order. The first disciple Mother initiated was Yogin himself.

It happened like this: while on pilgrimage in Vrindaban with some women companions, and Yogin, Latu (Swami Adbhutananda), and Kali (Swami Abhedananda), Mother had a kind of dream/vision in which Sri Ramakrishna appeared to her and told her to initiate Yogin and even told her what mantra to give. (Yogin had not received a mantra from Sri Ramakrishna.) Mother thought that

she was just imagining things and ignored it. But she had another vision. She thought, 'What will people think? The Master has just passed away and she has already started making disciples.' So she still continued to ignore it. Then she had a third vision. This time she argued with Sri Ramakrishna, 'I don't even talk to Yogin.' Holy Mother was so shy that she used to talk to men devotees through her women companions. Sri Ramakrishna responded by telling her to have Yogin-Ma help her. Mother sent Yogin-Ma to Yogin only to find out that he also had had the same vision. Finally Mother consented and initiated him. She went into an exalted state at the time of initiation and while giving the mantra, she uttered it so loudly that Yogin-Ma heard it in the adjacent room. With Yogin's initiation, Mother's spiritual ministry began.

During this year while Holy Mother was on pilgrimage, she had many visions and spiritual experiences. The holy associations of Vrindaban and other places, in addition to several visions of Sri Ramakrishna, kept Mother in a state of deep spiritual ecstasy. Sri Ramakrishna had assured her that there had been no separation between them. Mother continually lived in a higher state of consciousness; all her sorrow and grief melted away. Very few of Sri Ramakrishna's or Mother's male disciples had free access to Mother, but Yogin was one of her closest sons. After his passing away she would say, 'No one loved me like Yogin. Whenever he was given some money or even some trifling thing, he would say, "I'll keep it for Mother's use, she may have some need for it." He would sit next to me and say, "Mother, call me Yogā."'" Mother and her service were always top priority for him. His own convenience or health were never considerations. Nothing was ever too much trouble when it came to serving her; he would go to any length to meet her needs. Holy Mother, in turn, was unstinting in her praise and appreciation of Yogin's service. Swami Aseshananada told a story that once Mother wanted something from the market



and she asked Latu Maharaj to go for her. He replied, 'No, Mother, I am meditating; I don't want to go there with so many people and so much noise and bustle.' Mother said, 'Then call Yogin.' Swami Yogananda was talking with some visitors but left them mid-sentence and immediately ran to Mother. He was one of the first of the disciples to recognize Holy Mother as the Divine Mother herself. He related how both Golap-Ma and Yogin-Ma had told him that in a rare moment Mother admitted that she was Radha. The swami had such deep reverence for Mother that he would not touch her feet in salutation, but would bow down touching his head to the ground where she had been standing.

We are very fortunate that Swami Yogananda left such vivid reminiscences of the days he spent with Holy Mother, especially while in Vrindaban. I think we cannot be grateful enough to the swami for giving us this insight into the nature of Holy Mother's spiritual experiences. As we said in the beginning, it is through the life of great souls that we get a window into the world of the spirit. On several occasions her women companions found Holy Mother so deeply absorbed that the swami had to bring Mother back from the state of samadhi by chanting the Lord's name. The swami recalled, 'I then repeated the name of Ramakrishna with all my might and strength of voice and then Mother seemed to come down to the ordinary sense plane.' He observed: 'During such periods of ecstasy, Mother's manner of speech, her voice, her way of taking food, her mode of walking, and her general behaviour were exactly like those of the Master. We have heard that in deep meditation the worshipper and the worshipped become one. The scriptures mention a spiritual state known as *tādātmya bhāva*, being at one with God. We have read in the *Bhāgavata* how the gopis, unable to bear the separation from Krishna, became so deeply absorbed in the thought of Him that they forgot for the moment their own individualities and behaved as if each one of them were a Krishna

by herself. In the same manner Mother too forgot her own separate existence and acted just like the Master, feeling her oneness with him. When I put to her some intricate questions about spiritual matters, shortly after her states of samadhi, she replied in a God-intoxicated mood, very much like Sri Ramakrishna, that is, in the same manner characteristic of the Master, using even the same easy style of expression with metaphors and parables.' The swami goes on to say: 'We were surprised to see the spirit of Sri Ramakrishna unified with her. It was unique. We realized that the Master and Mother were one in essence, though appearing in separate forms. Is it not said in the scriptures, "Lord, thou art man, thou art woman"? The Master told me many times that there was no difference between his body and that of Mother.' The swami observed a great transformation coming over Mother, and from then on she was always immersed in bliss. Sometimes she behaved like a simple, innocent girl. He continued, 'While at Vrindaban, by the grace of Mother I could understand and appreciate the divine sport of Krishna.'

Another unusual episode happened shortly after the party left Vrindaban for Hardwar in the foothills of the Himalayas. Swami Yogananda was suddenly attacked with a high fever. When Yogin-Ma was nursing him, giving him pomegranate seeds to eat, Holy Mother had a vision that Sri Ramakrishna himself was being fed.

Swami Yogananda spent a year with Holy Mother in various holy places in northern India. Simultaneous with their pilgrimage, the Baranagore monastery was being established. When Holy Mother returned from this first pilgrimage, she spent about nine months in Kamarpukur. At that time the swami went to Baranagore Math and took the final vows of sannyasa along with some of the others who had been absent from the monastery. Swami Yogananda had been one of the young men who had received the ochre cloth from Sri Ramakrishna at Cossipore. Now the monks



were slowly forming themselves into an Order which a hundred years later would be an international organization, having monks in many countries throughout the world.

For the rest of his life Swami Yogananda alternated between staying at the monastery as it shifted from place to place, at Balaram Bose's house in Calcutta, where quite a few of the monks lived from time to time, accompanying Mother on a number of pilgrimages or staying wherever she was living at the time, and briefly living in Varanasi, where he practised such intense austerities that he shattered his health permanently. Though the swami only lived at the monastery for a few months at a time, he worked tirelessly. Doing japa day and night, he hardly slept or ate at all. As a result, he started having terrible headaches. His brother disciples prevailed upon him, just as Sri Ramakrishna had done at Cossipore, to rest a few hours daily. An uncompromising monk, he was tender with others but strict with himself. He was prepared to give up anything for God-realization, including his own body. Recalling the hardships of the Math, Swami Vivekananda's brother Mahendranath recalled his impression when he saw Yogin at this time: 'One afternoon Yogin, the son of the well-to-do Sabarna Choudhury family, was returning from the market barefoot and carrying on his bare back a bag of vegetables and an earthen pot in his hand.' Many of his brother disciples, as well as the next generation of monks, spoke of his saintly qualities and testified to the uplifting intensity of the swami's presence. Swami Virajananda wrote in his memoirs: 'Everyone felt great reverence for him. His mind was centered in intense meditation and utter dispassion.' Latu Maharaj reminisced, 'When Brother Yogin returned from pilgrimage a tangible spiritual atmosphere was created in the Math.' Through his burning renunciation, he radiated spiritual fervour. Swami Shuddhananda (one of Swamiji's disciples), who lived with Swami Yogananda for some time, recalled: 'Yogin Maharaj was so absorbed in meditation

most of the time that his face would always look serene and luminous. Even when he would come from his bath, one would feel that he had just come out of his deep meditation.' For whom was the swami practising all of these austerities? He generated, accumulated, and infused tremendous spiritual power into the future Ramakrishna Order. What greater contribution could the swami have made?

Though Swami Yogananda was a serious monk, he had a good sense of humour. He was witty and enjoyed bantering with his brother disciples. Two humorous stories involving the swami during these early days of the monastery have been recorded. When he returned from Vrindaban, he brought a few rosaries made of tulasi beads, a bag for rosaries, and some *tilakmāti* (holy clay), which is used to paint religious marks on the body of a sadhu. One day Swamiji jokingly suggested to his brother disciples to dress him up like a *vairāgi* (wandering sadhu). Swamiji began to mimic a professional *vairāgi*, dancing around and making faces at Yogin. Making a parody of a Vaishnava song, he sang and gestured while dancing around him. The other monks roared with laughter at Swamiji's imitation. Then suddenly Swamiji shouted, 'Hari Bol!' and they all stood up and danced for hours with such spiritual fervour the floor nearly collapsed. Another time Swami Yogananda went out to beg for his food, as is the custom of monks. When he approached a thatched cottage in Alam-bazar, a feisty Bengali woman who had been sweeping her house furiously berated him, shouting: 'Get out of here! Why don't you get a job and make money? You are a cheat, checking out houses during the day so that you can come back and steal at night.' When she wanted to make a point, she would bang her broom on the floor. The swami thought it was hilarious. When he returned to the monastery, he imitated the woman so perfectly the brothers rolled on the floor with laughter. You may remember that Sri Ramakrishna himself was a marvellous mimic.

In between stays at the monastery, when-



ever Swami Yogananda lived with Holy Mother, he did all sorts of jobs: he received guests, regulated visits of those who wanted to see her, dealt with the outside business of the household, ran errands; in short, he did *everything* to make her comfortable. The swami shielded and protected Mother's privacy, as she was exceedingly shy and preferred not to be in the public gaze. Often he was chided by the other monks for being around women so much, but the swami never cared for such remarks. Devoted service to Mother, regardless of what it entailed, was his worship. Besides, Swami Yogananda was far beyond such concerns. Mother fully reciprocated his loving attention. Years later when someone wanted to mend a worn-out quilt that he had given her, Mother declined because she didn't want to change the appearance of his loving gift to her. Just the sight of it brought to mind the memory of her dear son. She would say, 'Yogin and Sharat [Swami Saradananda] belong to my inner circle.'

During the last years of his life, the swami clearly demonstrated his keen intelligence and organizing ability. During 1895-97 he organized huge public celebrations of the birth anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna in Dakshineswar. In 1898 he organized a similar programme at Belur. The extraordinary success of these events against unbelievable odds was due primarily to the indefatigable efforts of the swami and the magnetic influence he had on the young men of the time. The swami was a source of great attraction; his sweet amiable nature naturally drew others to him. Feeling at ease with the swami, the young men mixed with him freely. In fact, many who came into contact with him were so charmed that afterwards they joined the Ramakrishna Order and became dedicated monks. One young member of the monastery wrote with regard to him: 'He was such a great saint that it fills one with awe to belong to the Order to which he belonged.'

In 1897 when Swami Vivekananda returned to India triumphant from his first visit

to the West, it was Swami Yogananda who was the moving spirit behind the grand reception that was organized in Calcutta in Swamiji's honour. The swami, along with others, created a sensation throughout the city by mobilizing thousands and thousands of people in Swamiji's name. In May of that year Swamiji founded the Ramakrishna Mission, and Swami Yogananda was elected vice-president. Some of the monks were having difficulty reconciling Swamiji's liberal ideas, which they felt were not in accord with what Sri Ramakrishna wanted them to do. Swami Yogananda became the spokesman for the dissenting group. When the meeting adjourned, he directly challenged Swamiji by insinuating that he had adopted Western methods in spreading Vedanta, and thereby was not following Sri Ramakrishna's instructions. Swami Yogananda's comments deeply provoked Swamiji. He became grave; the room was filled with tension as he lashed out at the swami with fiery words: 'How do you know that these methods are not in keeping with his ideas? Sri Ramakrishna was the embodiment of infinite ideas; do you want to confine him within your own limits? I shall break those limits and scatter his ideas broadcast all over the world. He never instructed me to introduce worship of him, and so forth. The methods of spiritual practice, concentration and meditation, and the other higher ideals of religion that he taught—those we must realize and teach to all human beings. Infinite are the ideas and infinite are the paths that lead to the goal. I was not born to create a new sect in this world, too full of sects already. Blessed are we that we have found refuge at the feet of our Master. It is our duty to give the ideas entrusted to us freely to the whole world.' Swami Yogananda understandably remained silent, so Swamiji continued, 'Time and again I have received marks of his grace. He himself is at my back and is making me do all these things.' Swami Yogananda had such great love for Swamiji, he acquiesced, telling Swamiji that he was always ready to follow him, though



doubts sometimes arose in his mind regarding his interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. Two years later a similar incident happened. The two swamis were chatting amicably about social work, when Swamiji commented in a humorous vein: 'Who would have known about your Master if I had not spoken about him?' Swami Yogananda jokingly retorted: 'If it were not for him, you would at most have become a big lawyer!' But as Swami Yogananda pushed the subject further, Latu Maharaj also began to challenge Swamiji accusing him of not teaching devotion in the way Sri Ramakrishna had done. All of their resentments and objections seem to come to a head. Swamiji now cleared the air once and for all. 'You think you understand Sri Ramakrishna better than myself!' He thundered on and on revealing his innermost thoughts and feelings about Sri Ramakrishna and the message he had empowered him to spread, until finally overwhelmed with intense emotion, he left the room. Latu Maharaj later remarked that he was stunned to hear these things from Swamiji. Swami Yogananda had ignited a blazing fire in Swamiji and an amazing self-revelation was the result. His provocation ended up unifying the brotherhood, never again did any of the monks question Swamiji's ideas.

Swamiji had deep respect for and implicit faith in Swami Yogananda's intelligence and foresight. Before he purchased the land at Belur for the permanent site of the new monastery, he sent Swami Yogananda to inspect it. Earlier both Swamis Yogananda and Brahmananda had made strenuous efforts searching for suitable property, but it was



Swamis Niranjanananda and Vijnanananda who located the Belur Math land. When Swami Yogananda toured the grounds, he could visualize the wonderful potential of the property; he was obviously delighted and after returning to the monastery told Swamiji that he should go and see it. Swamiji had such trust in Swami Yogananda's judgement that he took him on his word. Once the land was

purchased, it was Swami Yogananda who brought Holy Mother there the first time to sanctify the new site. For after all, she was the Mother of the Ramakrishna Order, through her prayers their search had ended. Later, Holy Mother related that for a long time she had been having a recurrent vision of Sri Ramakrishna living on the land in a little cottage right where the monastery would one day be built.

Swami Yogananda's health, never good after his stay in Varanasi, began to decline rapidly. He enlisted the help of Krishnalal Maharaj (Swamiji's disciple, later Swami Dhirananda) to help him in the service of Holy Mother. One day Swamiji severely scolded Swami Yogananda for having a young brahmachari in a household full of women. Swamiji rebuked him saying, 'So many types of women come here to see Mother, if his spiritual life is jeopardized who will take his responsibility?' Touching his heart, Swami Yogananda replied: 'Brother, I will be responsible. I am ready to sacrifice my life for him.' Hearing the swami's large-hearted, earnest response, Swamiji was silenced. Toward the end of his life, Holy Mother wanted the swami's wife to serve him. Swami Yogananda was extremely uncomfortable with this suggestion, though it came from



Mother herself, because he felt it unseemly for a monk to accept service from his former wife. When Latu Maharaj came to see him one day and heard his objections, he got terribly excited: 'Forget it! People say so many things—who cares? If one is true to his religious ideal, public opinion cannot do anything. Besides, who will believe their howling? Brother, please follow what Mother says.' The swami accepted it saying, 'You are right. Let the Master's will be done. I am nobody.' Holy Mother was so anxious about her Yogin's condition that she became thin and drawn. She would say when Yogin feels better, I feel better; when he takes a turn for the worse, I also feel bad. In an unpublished letter to Mrs Ole Bull, Swami Saradananda wrote: 'I was in Calcutta last night watching Yogananda, who has but a few days more to live, poor dear boy! He was so good to me and helped me so much. May Sri Ramakrishna bless and keep him! I am thinking of going to Calcutta every evening for him these days. This will be the first death amongst the chosen few of Sri Ramakrishna. It will be a great shock to Sarada Devi for he has been with her almost all the time after Sri Ramakrishna left us. Well, His will be done!'

Swamiji said, 'Yogin, you get well, let me die instead.' The swami's mind was lifting into the world of light; he revealed one day, 'By the

grace of the Master I have attained so much knowledge and devotion that I am unable to express it all.' When the swami entered *mahasamadhi* in March of 1899, Holy Mother remarked with a heavy heart, 'My Yogin has departed leaving me here. Who will look after me now? A brick has slipped from the structure; now the whole thing will come down.' The swami lived an exemplary life; the embodiment of renunciation and purity, he demonstrated that God-realization is like a fruit in the palm of the hand. Being an attendant of the Divine Mother, his service to Holy Mother, the main duty of his life, continued through Swami Saradananda, who faithfully served her for twenty-one years after the swami's death, for just four months later Holy Mother's youngest brother, Abhayacharan, died leaving his insane wife and Radhu in her care. The rest is history. Swami Yogananda gave us his final instruction through a conversation with Swami Saradananda. Once Saradananda had confided in Yogananda: 'Brother, I do not always understand Swamiji. He speaks in various moods. Whatever stand he takes, he emphasizes that point so much that others pale into insignificance. I get confused.' Swami Yogananda replied: 'Sharat, let me tell you something: Cling to Holy Mother. Whatever *she* says—is right.' □

### ***The Greatness of the Indian Woman***

The American nun, Sister Devamata, said decades ago (see *Days in an Indian Monastery*): 'Unselfishness is a living, ever-present quality in the Indian woman's heart; a natural, spontaneous attribute of her character. She does not come last because she is put last, but because she covets the place. There have been notable spiritual teachers also among the women of India. I knew a simple-hearted mother in Madras to whom the gift of verse came while I was in India. She had always busied herself quietly about her household duties and was an unassuming gentle person without any claim to scholarship, but she was naturally devout and her "fancy work" consisted in decorating holy pictures. One day when she was working on one, a hymn to the supreme Lord burst from her lips. This was followed by another and still another. They continued to come as long as I was in Madras. As they poured forth she wrote them down. They were in Tamil so I could not judge their merit, but I was told by an authority in literary matters that they were remarkable for purity of form and chaste, rhythmic beauty of language.'



# Who is a True Sādhaka?

## AN UNKNOWN SAINT

*We publish an inspiring selection from A Saint's Call to Mankind, edited by Sri Madan Mohan Varma. There was a great saint in the 40s and 50s, who preferred to remain anonymous in print, but inspired even great men like Dr Radhakrishnan (who has written the Foreword to the book), Dr Rajendra Prasad, and others. Here are some of his words.*

**Men generally treat sadhana as a part of their life. The thoughtful, however, treat their life itself as sadhana.** Indeed, the life of man—being merely a bundle of desires and aspirations—is only a sadhana for eternal life. The superficial spiritual aspirant (sādhaka) regards his objective life alone as life, and adorns it by various so-called sadhanas even as a materialist, equating himself with the body, decorates it with various beauty aids. As all such decorations remain separate from the body, so all such sadhanas remain separate from life.

The difference between a man who makes sadhana only a part of his life and him who makes his life itself a sadhana is that the former fails to become one with the goal, while the latter never mistakes the wood for the trees.

The 'I' of the sādhaka who makes his life itself a sadhana is soon transformed into a yearning for Truth or God—by whatever name one calls the supreme Reality. In believing himself to be a servant of God, his whole life becomes an instrument in His service, and his mind and senses become willing tools. **Unless a man becomes a servant of God through and through, his service would only be of the category of 'good deeds.'** Similarly, unless one becomes an enquirer (*jijñāsu*) through and through, one's search for Truth would merely remain an exercise of the intellect. Unless he becomes a devotee through and through, his contemplation of God would only be a prayer for various objects, never true bhakti. There-

fore, true sadhana emerges from the whole 'I' of the sādhaka; it makes his whole life a sadhana and all his *endeavours* (*pravṛtti*) constitute only various forms of his sadhana. **The devotee must become entirely His. Then he will not be bound by the various forms of sadhana; but his whole life—whatever he thinks, feels or does—will become sadhana.** That alone can make for rapid progress towards the goal.

It should thus be clearly understood that, fundamentally, **man does not really become good by doing good, but does good by being good.** Bhakti flows from one who becomes a devotee, service from one who becomes a servant of God, and desirelessness comes of its own accord in the egoless. The entire life of such a one becomes a sadhana—instead of sadhana being only a part of one's life.

The sādhaka alone is the true man, and the life of a sādhaka alone is the life worthy of a man; all that he thinks or feels or does must be a part of his sadhana.

There is something basically wrong with the sādhaka whose mind and senses do not cooperate with his sadhana. Such a sādhaka should pause to consider deeply what is the goal of his sadhana. **The whole 'I' of a man hankering after wealth receives the cooperation of the mind; similarly the mind is bound to cooperate also with the sādhaka whose 'I' really craves for the Divine.** In case the mind does not cooperate, it only means that its owner does not really want that for which he poses to be a sādhaka. □



# Reminiscences of Swami Shivananda

SWAMI HIRANMAYANANDA

*Srimat Swami Hiranmayanandaji Maharaj is a senior monk of the Ramakrishna Order and a member of the Board of Trustees, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. His memoirs of his guru, Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, were published in the Bengali book, Shivananda-Smriti Sangraha. We are publishing its free translation here in parts.*

It's as a result of the good deeds of many lives that one gets an illumined soul as one's guru. Sri Shankara has said that three things are rare in this world: human birth, the desire for liberation, and *mahāpuruṣa-saṁśraya*, the company of an illumined soul. I had the great good fortune of the company of a *mahāpuruṣa*: I had taken refuge at the feet of Mahapurush Maharaj. I wish to narrate that story here.

When I was twelve years old, I got a life story of Swami Vivekananda for children, written by one Satyendranath Mazumdar. A deep interest to know more about Ramakrishna-Vivekananda grew in me after reading this book. I bought a copy of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita* (the Bengali original of *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*). Later, I read *Sri Ramakrishna, the Great Master*, Swami Prajnananda's *Bharater Sadhana*, etc.

I was born in Nawabganj, Malda district, West Bengal. I came to Calcutta and joined the Presidency College in 1927. I was staying at the Baptist Mission Hostel. There was a student there by name Sukumar Basu. He was the disciple of Swami Saradanandaji, the then secretary of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. Sukumar told me one day that he was going to visit Swami Saradanandaji. I had heard of Swami Saradanandaji, but didn't have the opportunity to see him. I asked Sukumar if I could accompany him. He said: 'No, you can't. The swamiji is seriously ill. None but his disciples are allowed to meet him.' I was also acquainted with one Siddheshwar Niyogi at the hostel; he was a relative of Swami Omkaranandaji. I visited Belur Math by

steamer from Baghbazar with Niyogi once. Swami Shivanandaji was not there—he had gone to Madhupur, Bihar. While returning, I met Swami Pavitranandaji (who later became Minister of the Vedanta Society of New York, USA) on the steamer. I spoke to him for some time. The Advaita Ashrama at Calcutta was then situated in Mukhtarām Babu Street, and Pavitranandaji was its manager then. He invited me to the Advaita Ashrama.

I soon left the Baptist Mission Hostel and joined the Hindu Hostel. I began to frequent the Advaita Ashrama from there. The monks there would show all love and kindness towards me. It was there that I met Swami Vireswaranandaji, who later became the 10th President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission. The swamiji was the president of the Advaita Ashrama then. I also met Swami Virajanandaji (who also subsequently became President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission). In those days he didn't have the beard which he grew later on, and was very handsome in appearance.

One day I went to the Advaita Ashrama. Swami Pavitranandaji told me that the editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, Swami Ashokanandaji, had come from Mayavati. I went to meet him. He was seated on a bedspread, with books all around him. I began to discuss various things with him. In the course of our talk, I spoke highly of the freedom struggle and the freedom fighters. He called me a 'firebrand politician'. The Anushilan Samiti (an organization fighting for the freedom of India) had invited me to join politics; but I did not. My acquaint-



tance with Ashokanandaji grew into an intimate relationship soon. Noticing some restlessness in me, one day Ashokanandaji suggested that I must seek spiritual initiation from Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj, who was President of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission then. I said: 'I don't know him.' He said: 'I shall send you with somebody.' He arranged to send me to Belur Math with Swami Vimuktanandaji, the founder of Saradapitha, Belur Math. Though Vimuktanandaji was Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj's disciple, he was somewhat scared to take me directly to him. So he took me to Shivanandaji's secretary, Swami Omkaranandaji. Swami Omkaranandaji in turn took me to Mahapurush Maharaj and said: 'Maharaj, this boy is good—he wants initiation from you.' Swami Shivanandaji said: 'You will be initiated, my child; you will. But I'm not well today. Come two or three days later.' I went to him two days later. As soon as I offered *pranāms*, he said: 'Wait after taking bath in the Ganga. I shall send word for you.' Some time later, an attendant of Swami Shivanandaji (whose name I came to know later on to be Swami Shivaswarupananda) told me: 'Go inside the temple (the old temple).' Electricity was yet to come to Belur Math. A small lamp was burning inside the sanctum. That little lamp had created a serene atmosphere there. Swami Shivanandaji was perhaps performing worship. Before him were plates containing fruits, flowers, etc. Probably the fruits that I had brought too were there. Anyway, I sat down near him on an *āsana*. In front of us was a glass case inside which were the sandals of Sri Ramakrishna. Mahapurush Maharaj told me to offer flowers to them thrice. While offering them, he told me to pray thus: 'O Lord, I offer all my good and bad deeds, sin and virtue, at your lotus feet.' He later initiated me with the mantra and asked me to repeat it with him thrice. He said: 'You're a brahmin. You know the system of counting the japa on fingers, don't you?' He got up. But he didn't say anything about the customary offering (*guru dakṣiṇā*) at all. I had some money in my

pocket then. But I hesitated to give money to a disciple of the all-renouncing Sri Ramakrishna. I saluted to him. Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj said: 'Perform japa sitting in that corner for some time.'

Swami Ashokanandaji had told me before initiation: 'Mahapurush Maharaj initiates people in his room itself.' Hearing that, I was a little worried. Maybe therefore he initiated me in the temple. After the initiation ceremony, he sent some sacramental food to me. I partook of it and returned to Calcutta by steamer. For a few days after the initiation, I experienced some inexplicable joy and peace of mind.

While sitting in the class at the Presidency College, the thought of Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj would often come to my mind, and I would long to meet him. I used to keep my books at the Hindu Hostel and go by steamer to Belur Math to meet him. When I went one day in this way, I saw Mahapurush Maharaj sitting at his door, smoking the hookah. After I made *pranāms* to him, he said in a tone full of love: 'Why did you come in such storm and rain, my dear?' I experienced his love and compassion always. I once went to the Math and saw him sitting on a wheelchair; an attendant was moving the wheelchair to and fro in front of Swami Vivekananda's room. While the wheelchair came to Swamiji's door, I saw Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj exclaiming with folded hands: 'Jai Swamiji Maharaj!' And when the wheelchair went elsewhere, he wouldn't say anything. Seeing this, my regard for Swamiji grew immensely.

I wanted to join the monastery after my BA exams. But Swami Ashokanandaji told me to wait for two more years. But because I obeyed him and delayed entering the Ramakrishna Order of monks by two years, I could no more see Mahapurush Maharaj healthy. When I went and told him I had joined the Order, he lifted his left hand and blessed me because, owing to paralysis, he couldn't use his right hand. He muttered: 'Mm... mm... mm'. The reason was, he would often call me



'Malda' since I was born in Malda district. Of course, the part of the district where I was born is now in Bangladesh. Anyway, even in his precarious condition he hadn't forgotten to address me as 'Malda'.

When Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj was healthy, monks and brahmacharins would all assemble before him in the morning everyday. He would enquire about everybody's welfare. In those days the food and other facilities at Belur Math were poor. I had wondered if I could become a monk by eating such a poor diet. When I was having such doubts, one day Mahapurush Maharaj asked me: 'Hello, will you become a monk?' How could I tell him about the diet? So I said: 'Oh yes, I shall.' He said: 'You'll become a good monk.' I don't know if I have become a good monk, after all these long years. But his blessings have protected me always, and at no time have *kāminī* and *kāñcana* deluded me.

I remember what happened one day. I had gone upstairs to offer *pranāms* to Mahapurush Maharaj. The library, office and a telephone were all in the room he stayed. When I went, I saw Mahapurush Maharaj going up to the window, seeing something outside, and returning. This happened several times. Possibly he was doing some physical exercise. Another day I saw him showing love to a puppy by calling it various sweet names.

One day, probably a Sunday, I was ready to return to Calcutta from Belur Math. It was time for the steamer. I was anxious to return to my hostel. I quickly went upstairs near where Swamiji's room is situated, and saw Mahapurush Maharaj sitting on a chair immersed in meditation. With an intention to take leave of him, I saluted him. I offered *pranāms* by touching his feet. This sudden touch surprised him, and he told me in a harsh

tone: 'It's not proper to touch in this way.' Anyway, I returned to the Hindu Hostel that day. But I was a bit wounded and so wrote a letter to him thus: 'You have scolded me. If you don't like my visiting the Math, I shall not go there then. I am observing since a few days that you don't say anything even when I make *pranāms* to you. As if you don't recognize me at all. Should this be the relationship between the guru and the disciple?' Some days after I mailed this letter, I received a letter written by Mahapurush Maharaj's secretary, Swami Gangeshanandaji, and signed by Mahapurush Maharaj himself. He had written thus: 'This is Swamiji's Math. You must certainly come here. And I am not your guru. Sri Sri Thakur (Sri Ramakrishna) himself is your guru. But I remember you quite well.' On receiving this letter, I felt: 'Ah! What sublime love! I had deserved a turndown, but he has written a loving letter!' I had been to my native village for about a month and a half after this. When I went to Belur Math after that, I took quite a few fazli mangoes I had brought from home for Mahapurush Maharaj. As soon as I placed the mangoes in his room and saluted him, Swami Shivanandaji Maharaj said: 'Hello, Malda, how are you? The mangoes that you have brought are very good. Give them to the shrine, they'll offer them to Sri Ramakrishna.'

Another day, I took big size roses from New Market to Belur Math. The intention was to decorate Maharaj's table with them. But no sooner did I enter his room with them, made *pranāms*, and stood up, than he remarked: 'Ah! Excellent flowers. Decorate Swamiji's table with them; it will look nice.' In this way, Mahapurush Maharaj would motivate my mind towards the lotus feet of Sri Ramakrishna and Swamiji.

(to be concluded next month)

### Correction

Please note the following while reading the article 'Adequate Drinking Water for Villages' (February 2001): On p. 139, after 45,000 add  $M^3$ ; on p. 140, after 37,500 add  $M^3$ ; again, 7,500 becomes 7.5 and 6,500 becomes 6.5.



# A Pilgrimage to the New World

SWAMI SMARANANANDA

*Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj is General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Revered Maharaj has been visiting different places on invitation to deliver lectures and promote the cause of Vedanta. He recently visited some of the Ramakrishna Order's centres in Europe and America. Upon repeated requests, he penned down his feelings and experiences of the tour. We hope our readers will greatly benefit from these beautiful memoirs. This is the third in the series.*

## PORTLAND

On 22 April 2000, I left for Portland at 9 am. Swami Shantarupananda, the head of the Vedanta Society of Portland, and some devotees received me at the airport. Portland is the most important city in the State of Oregon. In the USA, the capital of each state is one of the smaller cities, not the biggest; it is so, perhaps, to keep the political people a little away from business activities!

Our Portland centre was started in 1925. Situated in the aristocratic Mt Tabor district, the centre has two buildings with a small garden and some parking space (a very rare thing indeed!). One of the buildings, called the 'Mother's House', is two blocks away. Swami Shantarupananda, who is quite young, took charge after Swami Aseshananda, the previous head of the centre, who passed away four years ago, at the ripe old age of 98 years. Almost all the devotees at this centre are Americans.

On Sunday the 23rd, I spoke on 'Peace in Daily Life'. Nearly 70 people attended the lecture. This was considered more than the usual number who attend Sunday services. In the evening, I went to the 'Mother's House' with Swami Shantarupananda, where Ms Vera Edwards, the president of our committee, and her daughter Alice, live. She had invited a few lady devotees too. There were 17 of them. I spoke on Holy Mother. We returned after dinner.

The Portland centre has a retreat, some 45

minutes away. We went there on the 24th. Surprisingly, in spite of its being a weekday, 35 devotees came there. The retreat is a 120-acre forest. Mountains covered with snow could be seen at a distance. Inside the retreat itself, there is a chapel, a pantry, a dining hall, etc. In the forest, there are shrines dedicated to the Buddha, Jesus, and also to other religions.

I spoke for a short while to the devotees. We returned to the centre after lunch. On 24th and 25th evenings many devotees, mostly Americans, assembled at the Vedanta Society, and there were long question-answer sessions. They dispersed after dinner.

On 26 April, Swami Shantarupananda took me to the Colombia Gorge and Makloma Falls. The road lies along the Colombia river. The gorge is deep and very windy: the cold wind can blow us off! The waterfall comes down from a great height.

In western countries, places of natural scenic beauty become tourist spots, well-maintained with all kinds of facilities. In India, we may be having more beautiful spots, but the basic facilities needed for tourists are absent. Another remarkable difference between India and the West is worth mentioning. Here in India, if we find a beautiful spot of nature, a temple would come up there; but in the West a tourist spot would come up. This is the basic difference between the two cultures.

## TORONTO

I left for Toronto, Canada, the next day morning. A number of devotees, besides



Swami Shantarupananda, came to see me off at the airport. Even a smaller airport like Portland has a four-level parking lot, which may accommodate 400/500 cars! I had to change the plane at Chicago, where the clock is two hours ahead of the Pacific Coast Time. The Chicago airport is one of the biggest—if not the biggest—airports in the world.

I reached Toronto early in the evening—that's according to local time. Swami Pramathananda and others were at the air-

port. Being in Canada, I had to go through immigration and customs formalities, but luckily there was no trouble.

The next morning, Swami Pramathananda took me to the Niagara Falls. We went to Chitta Mazumdar's house near the Niagara town. He and his American wife live there. This gentleman is an initiated devotee and a man of varied interests—cooking, gardening, engineering, and whatnot!

Niagara! It is world famous, and indeed deserves its fame! There are two falls—one American and the other Canadian—known as Horseshoe Falls. No other waterfall in the world is so massive! Of course, the height is not much. We went up the 775-foot-high 'Skylon' tower and viewed the awe-inspiring panorama of the Niagara. It is indeed spectacular. Again, we went down by the *Maid of the Mist* boat almost underneath the water-

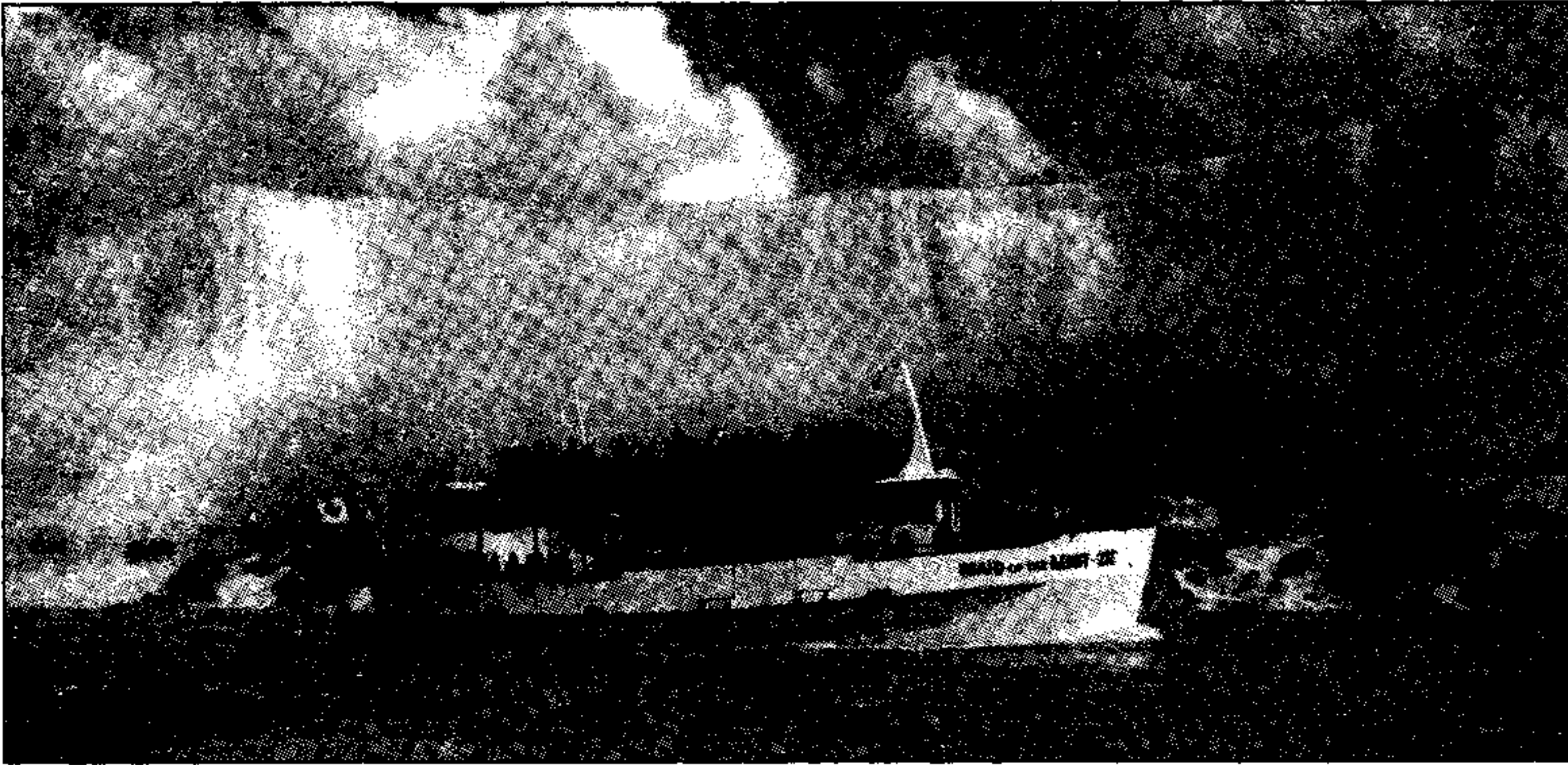
falls. All of us had to cover ourselves with plastic raincoats, supplied by the agency. It is no doubt thrilling and breath-taking. Both the tower and the boat cost us some dollars, but they are worth it!

We went back to Mazumdar's house. He had invited a few friends and had cooked quite a number of tasty dishes. Indeed a versatile man!

Our Vedanta Society in Toronto is a two-storeyed building, situated in a nice locality. With its many spires, the building looks a bit strange, but quite fits our purpose. It is a secluded, lonely building with nothing around, except for a park on the one side and an arterial road in front, which is met by two smaller roads. A little away is a vast, well-maintained golf

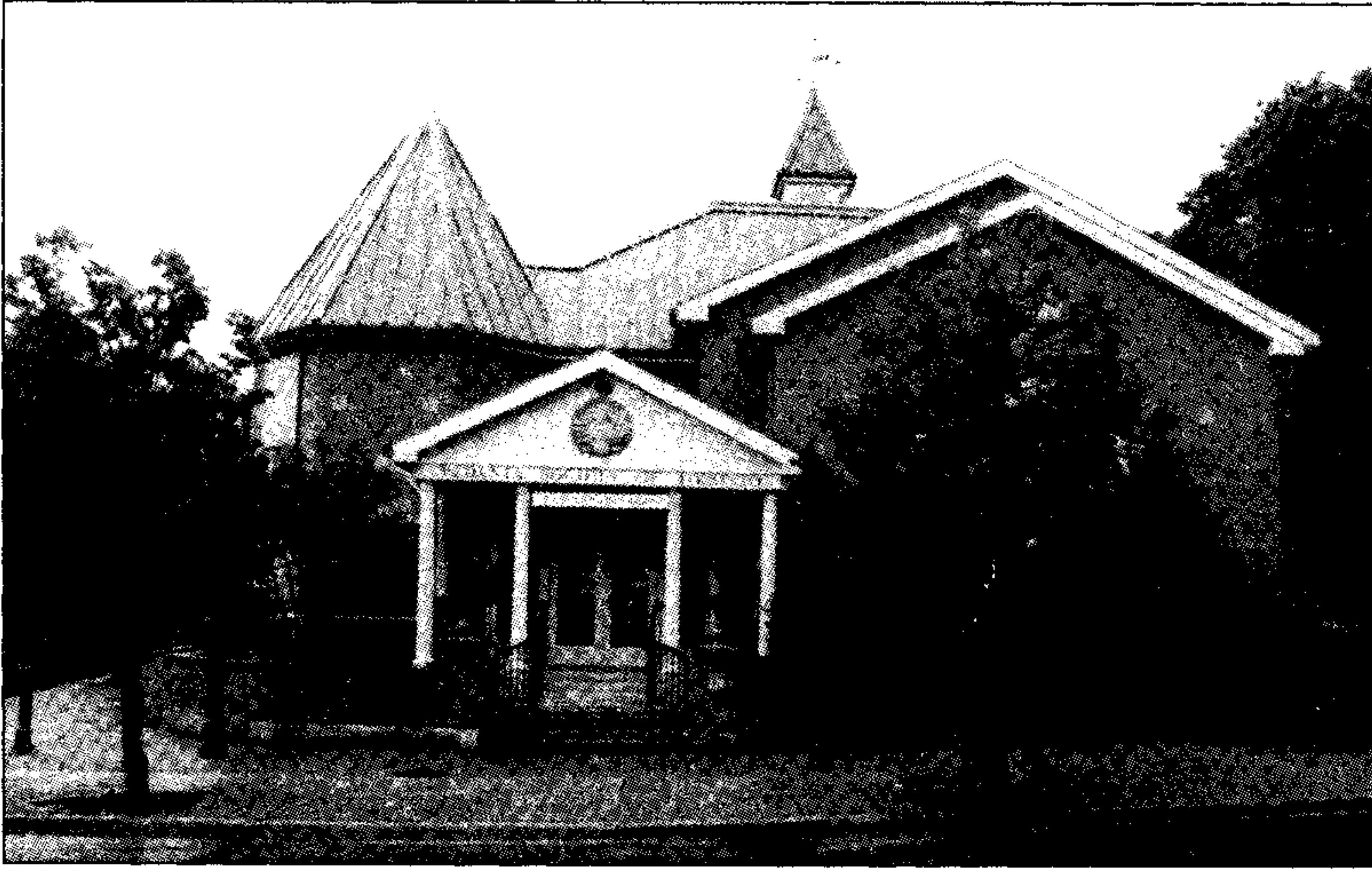
course. On another side there is a small river with a walk on both the banks. To the other side of a walk is a forest. Deer could be spotted occasionally in the forest. All together this centre is situated amid idyllic surroundings. The swami in charge of the centre purchased this place at a quite cheap rate (\$500,000) two years back.

A two-day annual retreat had been organized on 29 and 30 April—Saturday and Sunday. About 60 to 70 devotees were present—mostly Indians. I spoke for an hour on 'The Upanishads and Modern Age'. There was a question-answer session from 12.00 to 12.30 pm. On Sunday, Swami Pramathananda spoke in the morning, while I spoke in the afternoon on 'Ramakrishna Mission: Its Ideals and Activities'. The Indian Consul-General, Mr Bhandari, was also present on the occasion with his wife and daughter. There was one more question-answer session. On Monday,



*The Maid of the Mist sails past the American Falls on her way to the Horseshoe Falls*





*Toronto Vedanta Society*

vere in winter, though summer is hot. In Toronto the temperature goes up to 85°F in summer, and in winter it goes down to -30°F. Toronto, the biggest city in Canada, has a cosmopolitan population. Besides, Canadians, various other communities from different parts of the world live here: Indians, Pakistanis, Sri

Swami Pramathananda took me to the University of Toronto to speak on 'Role of Religion in Education'. Only 20 or 25 people were present. I spoke for 50 minutes. It was followed by a question-answer session for 45 minutes.

Canada is an extension of the USA. Its land mass is bigger than that of the United States, but the population is only 30 million as against the US 250 million! They say that the whole of Canada lives within 200 miles of US border, for the north is a frozen waste! To attract a bigger population, Canada allows settlers from various countries. Even then immigration laws are stringent. The cold is se-

Lankan Tamils, Thais, Japanese, Vietnamese, and so on. Sri Lankan Tamils form a sizable number—somebody told me there are 300,000! They are running three Tamil radio stations. I had to give live interviews in Tamil in two of them. The next day, I was persuaded to speak in Tamil in the Ramakrishna Sevashrama, an association run by the Tamils.

On Wednesday, 3 May 2000, I left for Chicago. Swami Pramathananda saw me off. The US customs operating at the Toronto airport put some questions, which seemed unwarranted. I reached Chicago at 3 pm.

*(to be continued)*

### ***Please Never Forget This...***

We must never lose faith in God, in ourself, or in humanity; for in this threefold faith lies the secret of all strength and all higher attainment. Whatever we think we become; if we constantly think ourselves insignificant and worthless, we shall become that. Man must possess faith in himself, but not in an egotistical sense—not as a person with a certain name and form, born in such a family and with a certain position in his community. It is in his higher Self that he must have faith—in himself as a child of God, a direct heir to Divinity. Have faith in yourself, in your vocation and in the Divine.

*—Swami Paramananda*



# Relevance of Vedānta and Hinduism in Modern Days

SWAMI AMARANANDA

*Swami Amaranandaji Maharaj is the spiritual minister of Centre Vedantique, Geneva, Switzerland. He was invited to deliver an address at the Third Parliament of Religions, Cape Town, South Africa, on 2 December 1999. His theme was, 'Relevance of Vedānta and Hinduism in Modern Days'. Swami Amaranandaji discussed the introductory part and the so-called weak points of Hinduism last month. This month, he concludes the discussion by describing the points of excellence in this great religion.*

## *Points of Excellence*

Let us turn to those aspects where, from a historical perspective, the excellence of Hinduism should be evident: (a) acceptance of plurality of approaches, democracy in establishing creeds, (b) balance between the two ideals—monachal and social, (c) basic formulations espouse the scientific vision, (d) great elaboration of steps leading to inner transformation, and (e) abundance of saints suffused with spiritual force.

*Acceptance of plurality of approaches:* Even in the Vedic days there were numerous masters, and around them, disciples. This is how *saṁpradāyas* (groups of thought) came into being. In case of a debate between two *saṁpradāyas*, acrimony was possible. But debates weeded out inferior or untenable doctrines and gave to all the democratic right of expressing views and persuading others to concur. In debates, however, since each side usually has a strong as well as a weak point, the long-term effect on the national psyche was the idea of the validity of each of the diverse paths.

It is because of this fact that Indians expressed their solidarity with all people persecuted on religious grounds: with Jews humiliated by Romans in Jerusalem, with Christians of the Eastern Church escaping to Malabar from the bitter factionalism in the 4th century (the hospitality and magnanimous gifts to the

Church by the kings of Travancore and Malabar have no parallel in history), with Zoroastrians who fled from Iran in the early 8th century, and with Tibetan Buddhists fleeing from the Chinese cohorts in the 20th century.

The precept of harmonizing (which is much more than acceptance) in one's own life the apparently diverse methods of spiritual life in ancient India is found in the *Gītā*. The 16th century saint Madhusūdana was devotional to begin with, but later took up the enquiry required by a monist, and ended up with monism as the base on which devotion was placed. **But the example of Sri Ramakrishna who traversed different disciplines of the devotional and the tantric paths, the paths of monism and Sufism, and contemplated on Christ, is shining solitarily in the hagiographical literature of the world.**

*Balance between the two ideals—monachal and social:* There are religions in which monasticism was either nipped in the bud or not allowed to flourish. There are others which exaggerated the prestige of the monachal robe and unduly enthused people to dwell in monasteries or nunneries.

The Hindu sages thought about a prescription that would do justice to the propensity for *bhoga* (material enjoyment) and would also help man rise spiritually. 'Go to the forest after you are fifty' they said. This advice, addressed to man, meant the following: Adhere



to the life and to the duties of a householder till both you and your wife become old; after that begin your spiritual voyage. This ancient precept is not totally dead. The continuing custom of passing one's old age in Varanasi through prayer and meditation is a manifestation of the precept put to practice.

A monk's or nun's immediate duty differs from the duties of a married person living in society. But they are complementary to each other. The social man supports the monastic brother physically (by providing food, shelter, etc); the latter is there for consoling man in distress, for guiding him in the spiritual path, and for bringing about cohesion in a society faced with great disaster (like pestilence, natural calamity, war, political oppression, etc). For example, Madhusūdana in the 16th century personally influenced the Mogul emperor Akbar to grant permission for taking steps to stop the persecution of Hindus in the Himalayan region.

The *Gītā* supports the idea that monastic virtues can and should be practised by householders aspiring toward spiritual heights. It declares that by doing one's own duty and worshipping God through that performance, one can ultimately attain perfection. The greatest example among the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna in this respect is Nag Mahashay, who, although a householder and not a monk, attained the heights of yogic perfection. In the 20th century, a host of young men and women voluntarily put aside their prospects of marital bond to serve the cause of India's struggle for independence, this service being elevated to worship. Quite a number of such individuals embraced the monastic life later.

*Basic formulations espouse the scientific vision:* In the recent past, during the World Philosophers' Meet in Geneva (1998), many Indian scientists pointed out the striking resemblance between the philosophical significance of quantum physics and the Brahman of Vedānta. One scientist, Dr A. Ghosal, Professor at the Institute of Theoretical Science in Oregon, USA, has put it beautifully in his book

*The Self-Aware Universe*, where he says:

A quantum object cannot be said to manifest in ordinary space-time reality unless we observe it as a particle. A quantum object ceases to exist here and simultaneously appears in existence over there; we cannot say it went through the intervening space. A manifestation of one quantum object, caused by our observation, simultaneously influences its correlated twin object—no matter how far apart they are. Therefore, science is pointing out that consciousness is fundamental.

The above scientific observation is in keeping with the Vedāntic monism which talks about the absolute unity of the multifarious facets of our universe, ie, matter, energy and all psychic forces. The validity of the monistic philosophy of Vedānta is thus coming to the fore. The idea mooted by William James, a man of science, in the beginning of the 20th century that **religious experiences are valid in the scientific sense of the term**, is gaining powerful support from quantum physics. Mind and spirit cannot be treated anymore as taboos by the people of science.

But much more basic is Vedānta's stress on *manana*, cogitation before arriving at a conclusion. Questioning and verifying with a doubt which is honest do not constitute an ignoble affair in Vedānta. If methods of science are applied to discover the kernel of religions, much of the excrescence in religions, which religious persons cling to, will fall. But ultimately, religions will gain in this process. What will be highlighted will be man's contact with the supra-sensorial object or phenomenon. This has been termed *anubhava* in Vedānta. The access to *anubhava* is the ambition of all Vedāntists. The *Gītā* says that a person who has got this has no need for the Vedas.

*Great elaboration of steps leading to inner transformation:* The great elaboration of steps to be followed in different disciplines, as formulated by different *sampradāyas* (sects) in India and enunciated in manuals of religion, is a



great chance for people of different temperaments to make spiritual progress. That is why many Christians are adopting Hindu techniques in modern days as a means of effecting the inner transformation. This spiritual feast is one great particularity of Hinduism. Religion ultimately is an individual affair, to be taken seriously; this is illustrated through the system of having an *iṣṭa-devatā*, ie each person having the right to choose his or her spiritual ideal. Hindus who have been born in the post-Ramakrishna age, or at least most of them, can resolve the dichotomy between the two ideals—the personal God and the impersonal one. This is the watershed between Abrahamic religions and eastern religions such as Theravāda Buddhism, Jainism and Vedāntic Monism. **So, Hindus as a class are better suited than the members of other religions to have genuine sympathy for both the ideals. This is a great advantage** when inter-religious dialogue is gaining momentum.

*Abundance of saints suffused with spiritual force:* The appearance of successful mystics in great number in all ages irrespective of the vicissitudes of the national life, of saints who crossed the level of ritualistic religion and communed with a supra-sensorial reality with such an intensity that their physical forms were suffused with spiritual energy, is a glorious aspect of Hinduism. Thousands of men and women within the ambit of Hinduism have attained to authenticated heights of spiritual perfection, a phenomenon that has not been observed on this scale in any other land. The galaxy of Indian saints from prehistoric times (like the composer of 'Puruṣa Sūkta') to the modern age (like Anandamayee Ma) has no parallel in any other firmament. Leaving aside Sri Ramakrishna—who, as it has been rightly said, lived 5000 years of national spiritual life in the course of 50 years—which other country has produced a saint of Bhakti *mārga* who can equal Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya of the 16th century? Or a seer of *anubhava* who can match Ramana Maharshi of the 20th century, who radiated the truth of cosmic unity in mundane

life after having tasted samadhi (the superconscious experience of the highest inner absorption)? They are the proofs of the highest dictums in the holy books of the Hindus. They have spiritually inspired and often transformed the lives of countless ordinary mortals—rich and poor, intellectuals and illiterates, men and women, and children too.

### *Position of Hindu Women*

One Hindu custom, generally found in Vedic literature and developed in post-Vedic Purāṇic lore, is considering God as mother. Historically speaking, this had a salutary effect. India's ancient history gives proof of the existence of women philosophers, saints, poets, artists and administrators. Śaunaka in the 5th century BC mentions 27 women seers of the *Rg Veda*, the ancient-most literature of mankind. Sāyaṇa adds two other names. Gāndhārī and Vidurā of the Epic days, or the historic Yaśomatī (mother of Emperor Harṣa), were towers of strength and character, attracting the admiration of the whole society. Rulers of alien faith have looked upon the chastity of Hindu women with admiration. (For example, the *Akbar-nāmā* and *Tūzūk-i-Jahāngiri*—biographies of two Mogul emperors—mention the depth of love, fellowship and chastity of Hindu women.)

In the 19th century, Sri Ramakrishna had the most extensive guidance from a Hindu nun. He, on his turn, elevated Sri Sarada Devi, the wife-cum-nun, to a high pedestal unparalleled in the history of the world. The Vedic society put two alternative ideals before women—the celibate lady devoted to spiritual quest and the housewife dedicated to family welfare. The two ideals were perfectly fused in the life of Sri Sarada Devi who was the de facto head of the monastic order named after Sri Ramakrishna.

It is true that in spite of the honourable position enjoyed by women in ancient India, their social status declined in later times. A major cause of this was that several Hindu lawgivers had put the marriageable age of girls to be between eight and 12 years. The idea



was that a girl should not know any man before her marriage and before her emotive mind at puberty would come into play. Evidently, in days without a printing press, and without the democratization of education, the girl's education and mental development depended heavily on the love and goodwill of her new family after her marriage. In reality it meant that women typically remained more steeped in ignorance than men in most families. It is proper that the national government in India has abolished child marriage. Hindu women today are coming up in every field of life. Their great test will be in the preservation of the chastity ideal while availing themselves of the opportunities of modern education. Swami Vivekananda, moreover, believed that it should not be men but women themselves who should determine the goals and lead the process of women's enlightenment. It is heartening that Swami Vivekananda's dream came to be a reality 48 years back when the first Hindu nunnery came into being within the framework of the Ramakrishna Movement. The activities of this institution include education and vocational training for women, health care, as well as spiritual ministration.

### *Ācāryas of Hinduism*

The actuality of Hinduism is the importance of the influence of *ācāryas*, ie teachers of religion and morality. The word *ācārya* is derived from a verb which means to conduct oneself (correctly). For all problems in life, even in ancient days, there was no instant guidance to be derived from some *śloka* (verse) found in a holy book. The Vedas say: 'When you have doubt regarding an act or a profession, go to a scholar who is a yogi, who has not lost his independence by being salaried; ask him what he will do if put in a similar situation, and do as he would have done.'

Before accepting someone as the spiritual guide for the long term, Hindus should test the person thoroughly by observing and evaluating his/her conduct, ie simplicity of life, sublimation of sex-energy and effacement of ego, as well as optimal scholarship. Only after such

an undertaking, only after the would-be teacher seems to have some justified claim regarding his/her purity and sincerity, can he/she be accepted as your *ācārya*, your guide. Only then the *ācārya* becomes venerable and worthy of affection. If this principle is not followed wisely, a powerful method of inspiring masses will become corrupt. This is a danger for Hinduism and for the world today.

### *Application of Ancient Wisdom*

What about the application of ancient wisdom—as possessed by a real *ācārya*—to modern problems?

For example, take the burning question of ecology which has been increasingly agonising our minds for the last 30 years. What clue does the ancient wisdom of Vedānta offer us to solve this? Vedānta will simply point out that man needs a change of attitude **first**, by shedding the belief that he has a right to use or misuse nature as he chooses in the pursuit of his happiness; and that this change is best brought about by accepting the Vedāntic epigram: 'Thou art That!' Man is inseparable from nature and whatever man inflicts on nature he inflicts on himself.

Here is a quotation from the essay 'Philosophy of the Tantras' authored by Swami Pratyagatmananda (cf. *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Vol. III):

The vast sublime choir of the starry heavens above and the 'still small voice' of moral consciousness within, dealing in categorical imperatives, are the two things that set the great philosopher Kant furiously thinking: 'Have they or have they not a common source or origin? The mighty master voice that leads the sublime heavenly chorus and the small masterful voice that speaks through moral injunctions, the mighty master ordaining the measure of cosmic harmonies and the little master regulating the inner springs of action in us—can 'that' and 'this' be equated to each other?' This raises the eternal issue—the little mystery that dwells within and rules as the hidden 'in', can it be assimilated to



the majesty and sublimity that rules as the displayed 'out'?

The mystics of Hinduism—whether Śaiva, Śākta, Vaiṣṇava or Vedāntist—have declared that this assimilation is possible.

Each of the positive points of Hinduism is an instrument to combat the ills of the human society. When most of today's wars and intra-national conflicts are linked to religious differences, the world needs the application of the Hindu model, namely, an acceptance of the plurality of religious approaches. The prerequisite for this attitude is **the intellectual conviction that transcendental mysticism is the goal of religion; this is the central message of Hinduism.** This has been emphasized in the 19th century by Sri Ramakrishna. The great rise in the number of a-religious spiritual persons in the world today is due to the dogmas of religion. Hindu sects have also their dogmas but the dogmatism is mitigated in Hinduism due to the overarching Vedānta tradition which puts emphasis on cogitation and inner transformation. The intra-faith tension in Hinduism has been eased out due to the recognition of the *avasthā-adhikāra* doctrine. The fact that debate and democracy were adopted in establishing creeds in India has facilitated the governing of India through democratic means during the last 50 years. Few countries in the Third World have been able to do so. The inspiration behind countless Indians fighting for political independence during a period of 45 years ending in the year 1947 is derived from the precepts of the *Gītā* and the message of Swami Vivekananda. Above all, the fundamentals of Vedānta are corroborated by modern science.

**We should bear in mind that from the date of the demise of Emperor Harṣa in the year 647 AD up to 15 August 1947 there was no Hindu governing any vast portion of India, and that for a period of 755 years Hindus were at the mercy of rulers of alien faiths. Therefore the Hindu society today is like an unmended old boat which requires repairs. There is need of a fresh look at our marriage**

system, at our democracy-shy priestcraft, at our service-shy religiosity. Our women should be given proper education; and all gender-related inequalities, in social as well as religious practices, should be brought to an end. Our tribal population should be brought into the national mainstream through the sharing of our cultural heritage.

And, there is another task—a task which has not been attempted as yet in any religion. When, more than 1000 years ago, the Indian nation by and large accepted the division of the Vedas into the section of ritualism and the section of knowledge, a great battle was won (in resolving the serious dilemma faced by people as to whether the method of sacrifice or that of meditation was the correct path; thenceforth the former was seen as the preparatory stage for elevation into the latter). Today we need the scanning of the entire mass of religious compositions to arrive at a broad consensus regarding which elements in those compositions conform to what among the following: truths, usages of a particular period, metaphysical theories, historical facts, mythology, mythical expressions, etc.

Perhaps we are talking about things much ahead of our times. Religions will take a long time, maybe another thousand years, to achieve the above goal because the religious piety (*śraddhā*) operates generally on the plane of emotion, at the expense of the flourishing of the other faculty, viz, analysis. There are, on the other hand, small branches of different religions where the opposite phenomenon has been operative. It seems that human beings, in general, have exhibited a lack in the faculty of blending emotion and rationality so far; this blending is the task ahead.

#### *Removing the Incomprehension Regarding Hinduism*

The major religions of the world fall under three categories: those arising on Indian soil, those formed by the lapping of the former Sino-Japanese ethics and art, and those issuing from the Middle East. Many westerners, like Anquetil Du Perron, F. Max Muller, R.T.H.



Griffiths, A.B. Keith, and in our times the Rumanian scholar Mircea Eliade, have tried to diffuse the Hindu wisdom in the West. But all of them did their job with a handicap—their inability to grasp the nuances of Sanskrit terms in particular contexts and the inevitable Judeo-Christian frame of reference staying in their minds. Hindus, specially the highly educated and in contact with the West, are therefore duty-bound to the western world and to the Occidentalized Indians to help them understand the salient features of Hinduism.

### **Conclusion**

Hindus, by and large, no longer labour under the compulsion of living under persecution or subjugation due to their religion. Furthermore, the dichotomy in the religious leadership of the Hindu masses—who were greatly influenced by the saints but guided in day-to-day life by the priests—is gradually vanishing due to the diminishing prestige of Hindu priests. Hindus should make the best use of this advantageous situation by mending their society in the light of Vedāntic messages.

Today we need to follow the footsteps of Swami Vivekananda, one of whose missions

was to remove the culls from the oft-projected picture of Hinduism and give an invigorating message of Vedānta to both the East and the West. **When our religion is thus made comprehensible to the modern man, when the practices incompatible with Vedānta are purged, when our education is spiritualized through de-secularization, when our nation gets united by the application of Vedānta, only then will Hindus be able to impress the world outside.** Only then can our *ācāryas* deliver what is expected of them—showing how to have the correct attitude to solve modern and ultra-modern problems: pollution, population explosion, escalating terrorism, ecological imbalance, unprecedented pauperization of man, 'genetic bomb', etc. Only then the song of the Purāṇic ballad will have significance today:

The residents of the celestial sphere sing, and the theme of their song is the following: 'Blessed are those that live in the territory of Bhārata.'

Let us, by our act and deed, justify our love for 'Bhārata' which may mean *rata*, or addicted, to *bhā*, or enlightenment. □

### ***Your Attention Please, Dear Reader!***

The devastating earthquake in Gujarat and the other natural calamities striking one part or the other are grim warnings to one and all: we aren't safe here. There may be trouble any moment. Moreover, for bringing solace to the suffering millions, it is imperative that we serve our suffering brothers and sisters. Most of our readers are working in different capacities, and so all are busy. Though many are very, very keen to serve the afflicted people, having felt their distress, they may not know the avenues to do so owing to compelling personal conditions.

### **What practical and workable suggestions do you have for our busy readers to serve those suffering from various natural calamities?**

In not more than 150 words, kindly suggest feasible methods in which thousands of our readers can be of service to the afflicted. As usual, kindly send your opinions to *The Editor, Prabuddha Bharata, PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat, Dt Champawat, Uttarakhand 262524*. Your full name, address, age, profession, etc, are to be mentioned. The best *doable* suggestions will be published soon. ***Please send your ideas before 15 May 2001. On cover, 'My Thoughts'.***



# RELIGION AND LIFE

## Swami Bhuteshanandaji's Answers to Questions

*The questions and answers being serialized in these columns are not meant to be scholarly expositions of various issues. People from different walks of life used to meet Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj daily during his tenure as President of the Ramakrishna Order, and discuss with him their problems and doubts; and Revered Maharaj would clear their doubts in a characteristically simple way. These questions and answers were recorded and read out to him before he approved them all for publication.*

### **What are the duties of householders?**

Householder devotees used to ask Sri Ramakrishna that, as they could not give up everything and seek God, what was the way for them. Sri Ramakrishna would advise them to perform all the household work but have the awareness that God alone was their own, the only Truth, and everything else was unreal. Sri Ramakrishna also advised them to remain unattached in the world. Using the metaphor of the rupee (sixteen annas make a rupee), he would ask them to offer fourteen annas of their mind to God and the rest for household work. He would assure them that God can be realized while living in the world.

### **Mahapurush Maharaj said once: 'Was I ever born?' Why did he say that?**

Yes, the very life of a knower of Brahman is an appearance, a semblance. He says that he has no birth, no death. That means his life is superimposed on the Reality. When the different colours of various flowers are reflected on a transparent crystal prism, the crystal appears to be tinged with red, blue, and other colours. Are they the characteristics of the crystal, or are they superimposed on it? Likewise, the different characteristics observed in the *jñāni's* life too are superimposed.

### **According to the Advaitic scriptures, I am Brahman. Can I meditate on this?**

Oh yes, you may!

### **Who are we and who are you? What is the mutual relationship?**

The Advaitic viewpoint has been taken up for discussion. So you are Brahman, and I too am Brahman. It is the Self or Ātman relationship.

### **I could not understand you, Maharaj!**

It is such a simple thing: what is there to understand? I am the Ātman, you too are the Ātman, so the relation is one of non-difference and unity.

### **But is this relation eternal?**

You see, you understand eternal or *nitya* as being there from birth to birth. But *nitya* here means *kālātīta*, beyond time. So by eternal, it is not that the relation is there for all time, but it is beyond time.

### **So are Ātman and Brahman one and the same?**

When you say that the '*ātmārāma* escaped from the cage of the body,' you mean something about the Reality. That refers to the Ātman. Brahman, again, is ever-existent and omnipresent. He or It cannot go anywhere. For He or It alone exists. Now, He who prevades your true 'I' is your Ātman, your mind, and everything. That which is saying 'I', 'I' is in truth the Ātman.

*They say that it is the jivātmā or the*



*limited soul that says 'I', 'I'. Can we call that also as Brahman?*

The thing-in-itself is not something different. It is all the same. When *jīvātmā* becomes pure, it becomes *paramātmā*. That *paramātmā* is Brahman.

*Maharaj, I have a question. If the knowledge of Brahman is everyone's right, cannot we women have that?*

Have women come flowing along with the tide-water? I have heard that the law has allowed the right to property to women also. *Brahma-jñāna* or the knowledge of Brahman is everyone's right. This is your personal property from birth to birth.

*Are Brahman and Śakti one and the same?*

By 'Brahman' Vedānta means the formless (*nirākāra*) and without attributes (*nirguṇa*). 'Śakti', on the other hand, is that through which everything is controlled.

*What is Brahman?*

'Brahman' means all-prevading. All-pervasiveness implies self-revealed. Brahman has no form. It is the ultimate Reality. The universe has been superimposed (*adhyāsa*) on Brahman. To the knower of Brahman, all that he sees is Brahman itself.

*Who is a brahmin?*

'*Brahma jñānātīti brāhmaṇaḥ*, he who knows Brahman is a brahmin.' However, he who walks along the path of knowing Brahman is also a brahmin. Again, the son of a brahmin is

a brahmin.

*Who controls human beings?*

Who else but the Lord Himself? The fruits of actions (*karma-phala*) are inert, how can they control us? Who gives the fruits of your actions when you die? It is the Lord Himself. He is the Controller and Ruler.

*We have innumerable objects of enjoyment all around us. Is this the reason for our running after them?*

Enjoyment does not need objects. It is not that the mind is becoming restless because there is enjoyment. *Samskāras* are there in the mind and they remind about pleasures. A beggar, who does not have anything at all, also dreams of numerous pleasures.

*What is mahat?*

*Mahat* is the gross material (*upādāna*) of creation. *Ākāśa* and *prāṇa* are the subtle elements (*tattvas*). But know that *ākāśa* too is Brahman, *prāṇa* too is Brahman, and *mahat* too is Brahman.

*What is meant by following one's own religion?*

A householder's 'own' religion is *gārhasthya dharma*, the ideals and duties of his domestic life; a sannyasin's duty is renunciation and seeking God. In other words, performing duties appropriate to one's way of life is the observance of one's own religion.

—Compiled by Smt Manju Nandi Mazumdar

OUR HEARTIEST GREETINGS TO ALL OUR READERS



ON THE AUSPICIOUS OCCASIONS OF



THE BENGALI NEW YEAR, BAISAKHI,  
BIHU, AND VISHU



# Ramayana: The Eternal Scripture

DR B. SURESHWARA

*Dr Bangalore Sureshwara has been actively involved for over two decades in the study and propagation of Hinduism and Vedic astrology. Dr Sureshwara's articles on Vedic astrology, Hindu theology, Ramayana, etc have been published in many leading journals of England, North America and India. In this article he concentrates on the influence of nurturing on the human personality. Ramanavami will be celebrated on the 2nd April.*

Sri Rama! This incarnation of God has been a household name from time immemorial around the world. Sages and saints have emphasized that the very repetition of His name regularly brings lasting peace, happiness, and bliss. A single word can become a power of positive influence. The most powerful word that can positively and powerfully impact and influence any individual is *Rama*. Millions of people of all ages have experienced magical moments in their lives by their devotion and surrender to Rama.

## *Historical and Theological Events*

There has been a lot of discussion over the date of *Ramayana*. Various archaeologists, historians, Vedic theologians and others have attempted to define the specific period around which Sri Rama ruled the empire of Ayodhya. They have indicated the period of *Ramayana* to be not later than 5000 BC.

The story of Sri Rama is the story of humanity from the eternal time. It is a story where even a most powerful person can pay a heavy price when letting down one's guard for a precious moment. Dasaratha's promise to Kaikeyi ultimately created a situation where his only choice was between getting engulfed by a volcanic fire or being consumed by an earthquake of uncontrolled vibration or motion. The once vibrant and dazzling Kaikeyi had turned into an uncontrolled de-

structive force. A tragic world history was developing when a man of immense honour was pitted against a woman of uncontrolled anger and greed. The resulting reaction emerging from the contact of the two diametrically opposite forces set off an infinite reaction that ultimately paralyzed the empire of Ayodhya for a long time. The tragedy in this situation was that a very noble idea—promise made by a person with lofty ideals to repay a gratitude—was turned into an evil desire to hurt all the loved ones. A boon was manipulated for evil purposes. Yet in the midst of all chaos, there indeed were many shining stars. The precious moment of royal coronation turned into a precarious moment for the citizens of Ayodhya. The scene at Ayodhya shifted instantaneously from the heights of joy and happiness to the gory depths of sorrow and misery. Kaikeyi was the catalyst for igniting the turmoil. At this historical moment, Sri Rama matched the despicable level of behaviour and performance of Kaikeyi with a matchless, divine behaviour to salvage the dignity of the empire of Ayodhya. The divine plan to bring Sri Rama face to face with Ravana was manifested through the acts and actions of Kaikeyi.

## *Nature versus Nurturing*

Kaikeyi's action is a classic example of how an individual's nature is trampled by

**Readers, please note:** The story of Rama had spread far and wide in ancient times. This is clearly evident from the Etruscan paintings, two of which have been published along with this article, which date back to at least 600 BC. These paintings were studied by Sri K. Raghavachary in the *Journal of Oriental Institute*, Baroda.





*Kausalya distributing payasa to Sumitra and Kaikeyi*

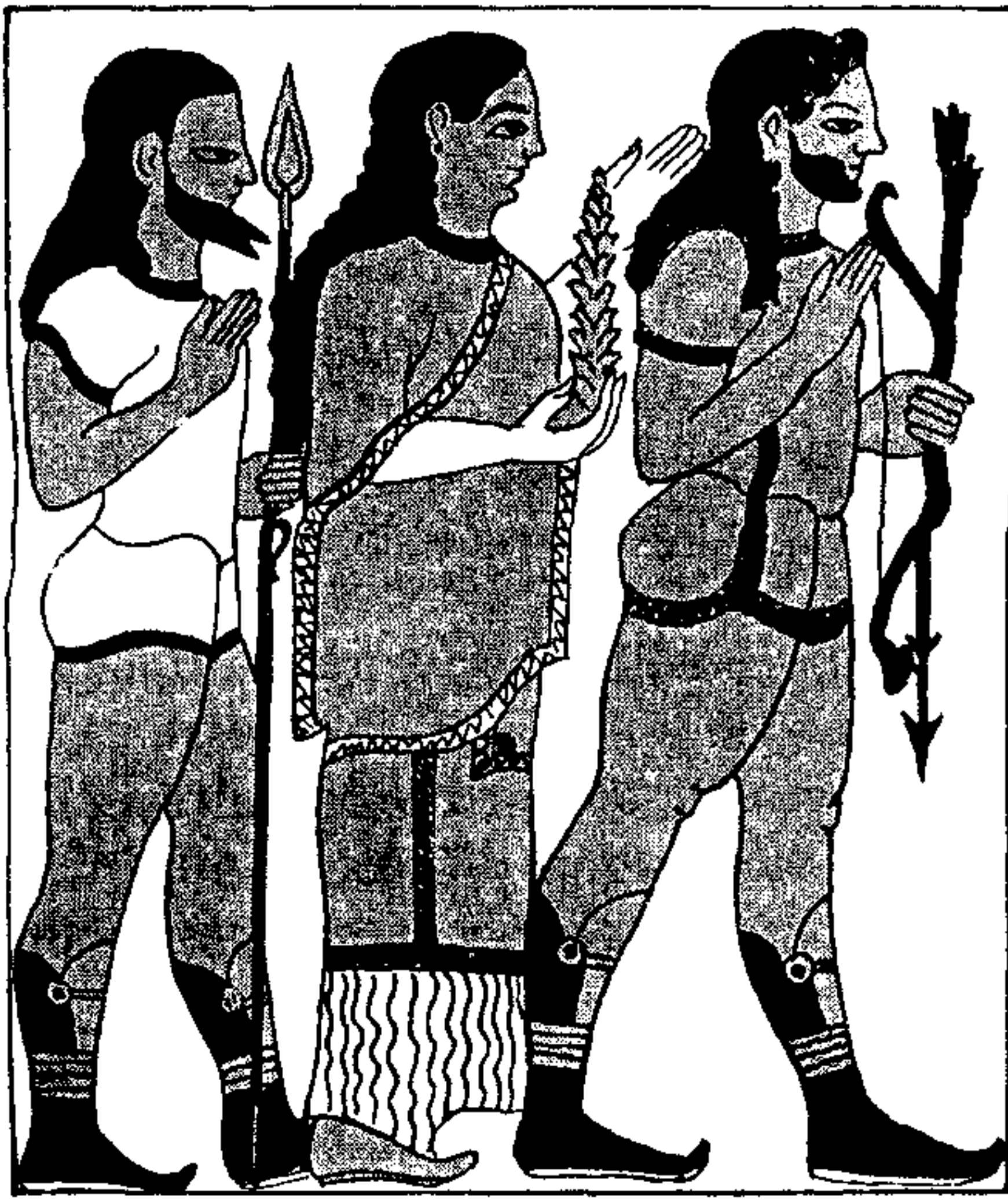
hostile nurturing. *Nature* is the quality that one inherits through his or her karma. *Nurturing* is the moulding of the individual that starts from his birth and through the various stages of life, concludes at the very end of life. There is a continuous and regular interaction between the individual's nature and nurturing, which can be friendly, neutral or hostile. Talking about nature, Kaikeyi was a wonderful personality prior to the day she was manipulated and brainwashed by her royal aide Manthara. Her affection for Rama was as much as for her very own Bharata. Rama and Lakshmana experienced virtually identical nurturing as they grew up. Their natures were not identical but not contradictory. One was calm, cool and patient; the other was somewhat restless, a little impulsive and occasionally impatient. The nature or inherent qualities bonded one brother to the other. The remarkable thing was that they also nurtured each other. The relationship between nature and nurturing in the case of Sri Rama and Lakshmana is a classic example of perfect affection and friendship.

Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra were all mothers to each of the four royal brothers. Nature had endowed Kaikeyi with limitless maternal love and affection for Sri Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrughna. Yet, a

wicked maid single-handedly altered the destiny of the royal household and the world. Over a period of time, Manthara manipulated and brainwashed a gentle and kind soul into a human snake. This shows that the company one keeps can significantly and positively or adversely affect even a strong personality. Kaikeyi was not a pushover but Manthara was a giant-killer. She killed the positive emotions contained within Kaikeyi and then embedded evil thoughts and information into a weakened personality. The fact is, negative nurturing, through the medium of Manthara, had trampled upon an inbuilt lifelong nature. In the case of Kaikeyi, evil nurturing had achieved a victory of sorts. All this simply means that those whom we choose as our advisers, friends, guides are more important than even the strongest of the known adversaries. In this regard, Kaikeyi failed miserably and paid a lifelong price for the giant blunder she committed by listening to Manthara.

At the other end of the spectrum related to the effect of nurturing or the other way around, the example of Vibhishana stands as a shining example of how a strong inbuilt nature can overcome the most adverse nurturing. Ravana, Vibhishana and Kumbhakarna were three different personalities. However, one thing that is certain is that they all went through the education and military training required for warriors. Ever since Ravana ascended the throne at Lanka, his prime objective seemed to be expansion of the empire at all costs. Brute forces symbolized his personality and dharma was mostly ignored, when it was not trampled upon. Although Ravana and Kumbhakarna had similar wicked personalities, it was a miracle that Vibhishana never accepted their arrogant and aggressive method of ruling the people of Lanka or the territories they had captured over the years. In a nutshell, Vibhishana was like an island surrounded by death and destruction. Vibhishana had provided over the years some 'checks and balances' in an empire that had completely lost its vision and values. Vib-





*Rama, Sita, and Lakshmana walking in the forest*

hishana's nature acted like a well-seasoned rock to withstand the evil and destructive nurturing occurring under the direction of Ravana. Now, one can compare and contrast the extraordinary performance of Vibhishana to the disgusting performance of Kaikeyi.

The words *nature* and *nurture* used in the above discussion are layman's terms. In fact, a significant portion of what is commonly referred to as nature is embedded in an individual's birth horoscope. A skilled and experienced Vedic astrologer can extract this information. Nurturing is a component of what is commonly known as free will. Kaikeyi's association with Manthara was through her free will. It was again the free will of Kaikeyi that encouraged Manthara to keep on talking until her evil objective was achieved. In any case, Kaikeyi's free will was vacillating and weak, and ultimately it was no match to the power of Manthara's loose talk. While the world may have Mantharas, individuals still have the in-built free will not to listen to them. Similarly, Vibhishana had the free will not to follow the evil ways of his brother Ravana. Unlike

Kaikeyi, Vibhishana was able to assert his free will, regardless of the consequences and abuses that he had to face as a result of his assertive decision. *Ramayana* gives us the magical courage and conviction that if an individual feels that he or she does not possess adequate free will, the best possible course of action is to completely avoid all Mantharas at all costs. *Ramayana* tells us that this may not be an easy decision but it is the only decision for the wise. One must never lose track of the penalty that Kaikeyi paid for the rest of her life. It is an important and never to be forgotten lesson for the entire world.

### ***Eternal Sacrament of the Hindus***

Any discussion covering the various characters and the historical events enshrined in the universal text of *Ramayana* is just the end of the beginning of sharing views and issues covered in it. The knowledge contained in the *Ramayana* is extensive. Anyone can see that there is no sight of the possible end to any discussion on it, at least within one's mere lifetime on this earth. The various levels and varieties of the discussion will have a meaningful impact and positive influence only when they are carried on with complete humility, decency, dignity and devotion. *Ramayana* is not a mere story but it is the primary theological sacrament of Hindus. We have inherited through *Ramayana* and other sacred texts or documents, an immense amount of spiritual, theological, historical and material knowledge and information from the sages and seers who lived exemplary, disciplined lives during the Vedic period. As we come to the end (or beginning?) of the discussion, let us continue to share among our families and friends the noble ideas and ideals enshrined in the story of Sri Rama and Sita Devi as contained in the spiritual and theological text of the universe. The noble ideas and ideals will nurture us to take one step at a time towards including and integrating spirituality into the material world that surround our lives. □



## What I Feel Is...

DR D. NESY

*In our series on popularizing philosophy, we have Dr Nesy, Reader and Head, Department of Philosophy, Kerala University, presenting her views.*

I am delighted to find that you also share the opinion that science ought to be tempered with philosophy, and that philosophy must be made popular and even exciting to today's 'smart' generation. But 'how' is a very big question. For philosophy is not an exciting, passing 'fad'—fashion at one time and out of date at another. It is a noble and sublime study, noted for its perennial significance and merit. In these days of 'vocationalization' and job-oriented courses, with heavy packages, philosophy continues to be an unattractive and dull subject. Deliberate and conscious efforts are required if philosophy is to attract bright students in this age of information revolution. Yet, apart from being a spectator dismayed at the sad state of philosophy, as a teacher of philosophy I do feel that the progressive devaluation of philosophy as a course of study is to be checked by incorporating innovative course-components into its curriculum.

We are living in an age of rapid changes in the social, political and economic spheres of life. The industrial, technological and atomic revolutions are producing a mechanically efficient world—a world of bewildering potentialities for both good and evil. The increased availability of means and resources for a better world go along with uneasiness, domestic strife, atomic and hydrogen bombs, radioactive gases and bacteriological warfare, to make civilization impossible. In such a situation, a wholesome life is possible only on the basis of a distinct philosophy of life. Accordingly, we have to think of a world that can be made better—a world as a process of growth and potentialities rather than of a fixed, static na-

ture—and a philosophy which can contribute to such a goal.

There will be no difference of opinion about the most urgent problem facing humanity today. It is neither economic nor political but a crisis of our value system. Nowadays the nature, meaning and purpose of human life has been so little understood that it's affecting one's relationship with the transcendent, the human and the natural world. The coarsening and declining of values has gone hand in hand with the growth of power to manipulate nature and life. Now that we live in one world, in which all alike are endangered by the destructive powers of mechanistic science in the hands of ignorance, it seems inevitable to pay serious attention to philosophy, a true search for wisdom. We must study the values for which Socrates died and Gautama Buddha renounced his kingdom, to be inspired and motivated.

Applied components in the philosophy curriculum tend to give an inter-disciplinary outlook to the subject. Areas of current interest, such as human rights, environment, medicine, yoga and meditation, personality, stress relief and relaxation, value studies, equality, justice, etc demand philosophical outlook and intervention. Most of the contemporary controversial social questions on the above areas are to be subjected to serious philosophical discussions. These are issues having deep philosophical roots. The fact that philosophical interest is extended to these areas is now more established than ever before. A diversity of thought-provoking and interesting arguments over such issues and the value of debate



over dogmatism will reveal newer strategies, approaches, clarifications, and discussions on concrete and specific issues of social relevance.

Inculcation of right values among students is accepted as the major objective of university education. Development of a balanced personality of young men and women of 'character' and 'ability' is the set objective of a brighter India. Hence components like the distinction between instrumental and intrinsic values, ideals of life (*puruṣārthas*), analysis of concepts like good, justice and the like are to be incorporated into the course-contents of various curricula.

The tendency to close down the once-prestigious departments of philosophy/comparative religion will remain a dream only if it gets the patronage and sponsorship of both governmental and non-governmental agencies. The felt aversion for philosophy can be overcome to some extent provided the curricula of information technology and professional courses got re-structured with a little bit of humanities inputs, in particular, philosophy. Live debates on issues of contemporary relevance must be included in philosophy.

Practical and applied components of philosophy must be strengthened. Philosophy must be made available to human needs, problems, goals, and aspirations. Informal courses open to all, seminars, workshops, debates, discussions on topics closer to human life go a long way in bringing philosophy down from its ivory tower to the masses.

There are strong arguments and penetrating discussions against applied philosophy courses, the most important one being that applied philosophy (ethics) courses threaten philosophy's tradition and heritage. But students seem to like such courses and this is to be capitalized. Students after experimenting with problems in applied philosophy, seem better prepared to experiment with the relatively abstract, subtle, and difficult problems in conventional philosophy. The relatively difficult problems of conventional philosophy combined with relatively interesting problems of applied philosophy, might attract some additional students to philosophy, keeping their intellectual potentials deep and rigorous. □

#### PRAYER ON THE OCCASION OF SRI RAMANAVAMI

सदा भोगभाजां  
सुदूरे विभान्तं  
सदा योगभाजां  
अदूरे विभान्तम् ।  
चिदानन्दकन्दं  
सदा राघवेशं  
विदेहात्मजानन्द-  
रूपं प्रपद्ये ॥

—अध्यात्म रामायणम्, १३.२७



I seek shelter in  
Sri Rama,  
the chief of Raghus,  
who is far away from  
those engrossed in  
worldly pleasures,  
but very near those who  
are contemplatives;  
who is the supreme  
source of all  
consciousness and bliss;  
and whose divine form  
brings immense joy to  
Sita, the daughter of  
Videha.



# Meditations on Madhu Vidyā

SWAMI SHRADDHANANDA

*We are serializing these meditations, based on Swami Shraddhanandaji Maharaj's talks on Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad (Chapter 2).*

## THE THIRD MANTRA

अयमग्निः सर्वेषां भूतानां मधु, अस्याग्नेः  
सर्वाणि भूतानि मधु, यश्चायमस्मिन्नग्नौ तेजोम-  
योऽमृतमयः पुरुषः, यश्चायमध्यात्मं वाङ्-  
मयस्तेजोमयोऽमृतमयः पुरुषः, अयमेव स  
योऽयमात्मा, इदममृतं, इदं ब्रह्म, इदं सर्वम्  
॥२.५.३॥

This fire is honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this fire. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this fire, and the intelligent immortal being, the soul in the individual being—each is honey to the other. Brahman is the soul in each; he indeed is the Self in all. He is all.

We know the five elements (*pañca-bhūtas*) earth, air, water, fire, and space. Of these five principles we take up fire or *agni*.

We see the same language used here as in the earlier meditations: '*ayam agniḥ sarveśāṁ bhūtānāṁ madhu*, this fire is honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this fire.' What is fire? It's the energy that produces heat and light. Think of fire—the fire energy or the heat energy. Think of all the ovens in your city and in other cities. And where there are no ovens, they are cooking outside using improvised fireplaces. Think of all the cooking going on—it's a cosmic fire.

Fire is necessary for many more things, and not merely to cook with. The fire or *agni* is needed in so many ways. Let alone the animals. Take up all the human beings in the cold countries like Russia and others. How important is fire to these people! We are fortunate. There is no snowfall here in Sacramento. But still it gets cold and we know how expen-

sive it is for us to heat our homes, because we know the comfort of electric heat and fire.

So this fire is so important to human beings. Can we ignore that? We cannot, and so in our contemplation we have to think of fire as a cosmic reality. Physical fire is the first part of the meditation. Next, think of all the living beings who are using these fires. What is the mutual relationship between them? That relation is *madhu*—that joy, harmony, usefulness, sweetness. When you go camping, you light a campfire, all right. When you are sitting by the campfire talking, chatting, and eating, you know this fire is so important. When the camp breaks, you bring some water and extinguish the fire. When we extinguish it, we should do it with a blessing, with a smile, with joy. 'O Fire! you are so important. I am extinguishing you, but that does not mean that you are my enemy.'

Thus in contemplation we have to think at the spiritual level that this *agni* is not a physical entity. The physical fire is the outside part, but in the depth of this *agni* there is a soul, the soul of this cosmic fire, the cosmic soul of fire everywhere. Think of that spiritual foundation of fire. The material entity, according to Vedānta, is grounded in a spiritual principle. So think of the spiritual principle, the Soul.

Now come to your Self. There is fire in you also. The Upaniṣad says, where is that fire to be sought in human beings? It's in the fire in speech, *vāk*, because for the sake of meditation we use the expression, 'a fiery speech.' Speech is an indication of the energy within us. If somebody asks you 'How are you?', you respond either weakly or with strength and



vitality. So through the speech an indication of the energy comes through our voice, through the sound. That is why the way you speak is so important in life. Thus the fire in the individual is expressed through speech.

First think of the physical *agni* and all the beings that are using it and are related to this fire. On the spiritual part, think of the individual aspect of fire. For example, a speaker forgets his body when he becomes animated or excited; he becomes one with what he is saying. For the time being, he has become *vāṇmaya*, filled with speech. That words are sparks of fire is the idea.

Just as the individual can be *annamaya* when you concentrate on the gross body, when you concentrate on your speech, a

speaking individual could be envisaged. All your capacity for speech, for words, is grounded in a spiritual principle, and that is the Soul. So the *vāṇmaya-puruṣa*, the individual who is boasting off his speech or words, has a spiritual principle, just as *agni* has a soul. In the depths of the individual as the speaker there is a spiritual principle and there is harmony between these two. The soul of *agni* and the soul of the power of speech are one and that is the Self.

When you concentrate on the unity, the *madhu*, then you slowly forget the *agni* and the speech. That unity is tying the two together, the soul of *agni* and the soul of speech in you.

(Next Month: The Next Meditations)

### *What the Hindu Believes in*

The Hindus have received their religion through revelation, the Vedas. But by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. The discoverers of these laws are called Rishis, and we honour them as perfected beings. ... Here am I in this body; it will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past. The soul was not created, for creation means a combination which means a certain future dissolution. If then the soul was created, it must die. Try and struggle, they [memories of past lives] would come up and you would be conscious even of your past life. This is direct and demonstrative evidence. So then the Hindu believes that he is a spirit. Him the sword cannot pierce—him the fire cannot burn—him the water cannot melt—him the air cannot dry. The Hindu does not attempt to explain why one thinks one is the body. This is nothing more than what the Hindu says, 'I do not know.' Is there no escape?—was the cry that went up from the bottom of the heart of despair. It reached the throne of mercy, and words of hope and consolation came down and inspired a Vedic sage, and he stood up before the world and in trumpet voice proclaimed the glad tidings: 'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! Even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.' Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter. The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst. And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure.

—Swami Vivekananda



# The Centenary Walk

SANDEEP KUMAR NANDA

*An engineer by profession, Sri Sandeep Kumar Nanda was one of the twenty-one-member group which trekked all the way from Kathgodam to Mayavati to mark the centenary of Swami Vivekananda's visit. Here are some interesting flashes of the trip.*

Upon hearing about the demise of his dedicated English disciple, Captain Sevier, Swami Vivekananda decided to visit Mayavati to console Mrs Sevier, and sent a telegram to that effect. Swamiji was to come up to Kathgodam by train from Calcutta. In order to receive him at Kathgodam, Swami Virajananda went all the way from Mayavati to Kathgodam on foot with some dandis and dandi-bearers within two days—an impossible feat in those days. Swamiji's health wasn't good. Yet he had arrived at Kathgodam on 29 December 1900. Halting at Kathgodam that night, the party started the next day amidst wind and rain and snow, staying at wayside huts and rest houses. The group spent the 30th night at Dhari, the 31st night at Pahurapani, the 1st January 1901 night at Mournala, and the 2nd January night at Dhunaghat. Finally, it reached Mayavati on 3 January 1901 at around 12 noon, to the joy of all.

Swami Satyabodhanandaji, Principal, Ramakrishna Mission Shilpapitha, Belgharia, Kolkata, envisioned a plan of commemorating the centenary of this event a year beforehand. He along with Swami Varadatmanandaji of the Ramakrishna Mission Students' Home, Belgharia, decided to make a trial run the previous year. Consequently, a party of four monks and a few

volunteers had visited Mayavati on 3 January 2000 successfully. This past experience made things smooth this time, and this trip was immensely successful.

Arrangements for the trekking began about a month and a half prior to the trip. A group of volunteers who could walk were selected. The President of Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Swami Mumukshanandaji Maharaj, encouraged the group and rendered all possible help. The formalities like buying train tickets were completed quickly. A three-day meeting was held at the Belgharia Ashrama, in which Swami Vivekananda's trip to Mayavati was studied, plans for the centenary trip were discussed, duties were allotted, things that were to be carried—sleeping bags, eatables, etc—were finalized and thus all were ready. Among the departments of work that were deliberated upon, food, medicine, accommodation and accounts management, and Bhava Prachar (spreading the message) were impor-



*The journey begins: The group being seen off at the Belgharia Ashrama*





*Spreading the message: Distribution of literature amongst villagers*

tant.

At 7:30 pm on 27 December 2000, the team of twenty members, headed by Swami Satyabodhanandaji and assisted in every way by Swami Varadatmanandaji, went to the railway station to board the Bagh Express. Before the train was flagged off, we offered Vivekananda literature, photographs, etc, to everyone—the guard, train drivers, co-passengers. Our compartment too was decorated with photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother and Swamiji. We all spent our time in



*A long way to go*

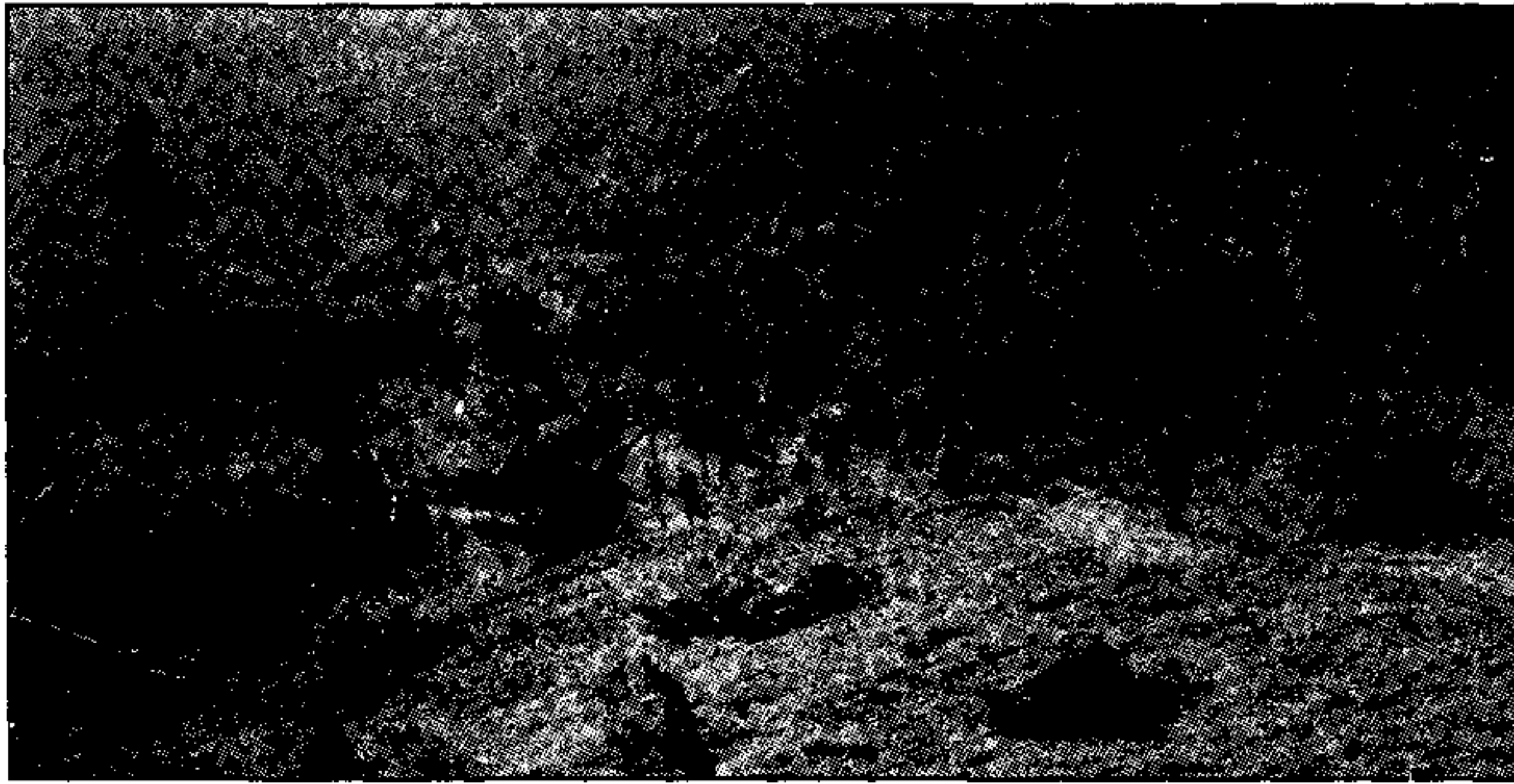
the train as if we were in an Ashrama —reading from scriptures and holy texts, singing devotional songs, meditating, etc. Some co-passengers were busy with their own conversations. We involved them also in our religious mood by giving them holy books to read. They were all happy to do so. Whenever there was a change in the duties of the railway employees on the train, we went to them and gave photographs of Swamiji and books. We also made it a point

to supply them to all the stationmasters and others in almost every station the train halted. At last, on 29 December, our train reached Kathgodam at 2:30 in the afternoon. A jeep had come from Mayavati and there were some volunteers. We loaded our luggage in the jeep and started walking to the PWD bungalow, Ranibag, about 4 km from the railway station. Here we met two volunteers from Ramakrishna Ashrama, Rajkot, who had come to hand over books and photographs for distribution. We also visited the local Chitrashila Shiva temple, returned, completed our evening prayers, and had a good meal, thanks to our cooking department headed by Varadatmanandaji. We decided to rise at 3 am the next morning. So we all slept very early.



*Tired travellers rest a while*





*Along the jungle path*

On 30th morning, we got up at 3 am, had a good breakfast, did some freehand exercises, and packed our luggage. Then started our historic trekking—the centenary walk. It was 6 am, and dark, when we left the bungalow. The nearest village we crossed was Chandadevi. The local postmaster had been introduced to the party during the previous year's trip. So he arranged for coffee and snacks for all of us. Walking sometimes on the vehicular road, and sometimes along the hilly tracks, the party reached Silory village, where we distributed photographs and books. We walked further on, and were tired after some time. We sat down at a place for rest. Near by, there were some telephone department workers, busy distributing sweets of the Id festival after their work. They saw us, came running, and fed all of us with sweets.

We soon reached the Bhimtal lake. Here also we had tea and snacks. It was the result-announcement day in various schools around, and so everyone welcomed the party with joy. Our Bhava Prachar department went on distributing books and photographs of Swamiji. Thus, walking, resting, snapping pictures, and refreshing ourselves with tea and snacks, we reached Dhari. When we reached the local primary school on 30th evening, after covering about 36 km, we were all tired. Yet our cooking

department had come ahead of us and had arranged for hot water and good meals. We all rested there after prayers.

We got up early on the 31st morning and, getting ready, walked over to the ADM's office about 1 km away from our resting place. It was in this office—then a dak bungalow—that Swamiji had halted for the night a century ago. We placed Swamiji's photograph there,

sang a few songs, and started on our trekking at about 10.30 am. By 4:30 that evening, we reached the Pahurapani PWD bungalow, where Swamiji had stayed. We had walked



*Reading from Swamiji by the author under candlelight at Dhari*

about 16 km that day. Swamiji had been forced to spend the night in a tea shop belonging to one Tikka Singh. We went there, met Madhao Singh, the grandson of Tikka Singh, were en-



*Pahurapani PWD bungalow*





*Pahurapani: With Madho Singh's family in his tea shop*

tertained cordially with tea, and sat in the small room in which Swamiji had stayed. We, as usual, sang one or two songs and read Swamiji's words there too. Swamiji had spent the last day of the century at that place; we too spent it by sitting up before a *dhuni* fire till late at night, singing, praying, meditating.

The next day, 1 January 2001, our destination was Mournala dak bungalow, 14 km away. It began to rain. It was very cold too. We reached the bungalow, settled down, and converted a room into a prayer-room. We celebrated the New Year, Swami Saradanandaji's birth anniversary, and Kalpataru Day here. As it was cold and raining, we lit a fire in the fireplace, and also had a sumptuous meal. We went to bed soon that night.

The next day's journey was the longest in our trekking. We, therefore, began rising up from 2 am itself. When we came out at 3 am, what we saw thrilled us: the area was covered with snow. We had tea and snacks, packed up, and at 5 am, continued our walk. We had to walk lighting our torches. Houses, trees and everything else was covered with snow. We were all very excited at the sight; we began singing as we walked. We snapped photographs too and that was another adventure in itself.

After crossing the Birchula village, snow wasn't there anymore. We had tea in the next village, in a

tea stall. The young shopkeeper was happy to see us and had himself photographed with us. He also gave us some bitter-sweet fruit, fresh from his tree, to eat. Soon we had a group of students walking with us up to Devidhura—the land of Mother Varahi, a form of Mother Durga. A student's mother requested us to eat at her house and proceed further. But we couldn't for want of time. This stretch was perhaps the most difficult one we had to cross. We did not go

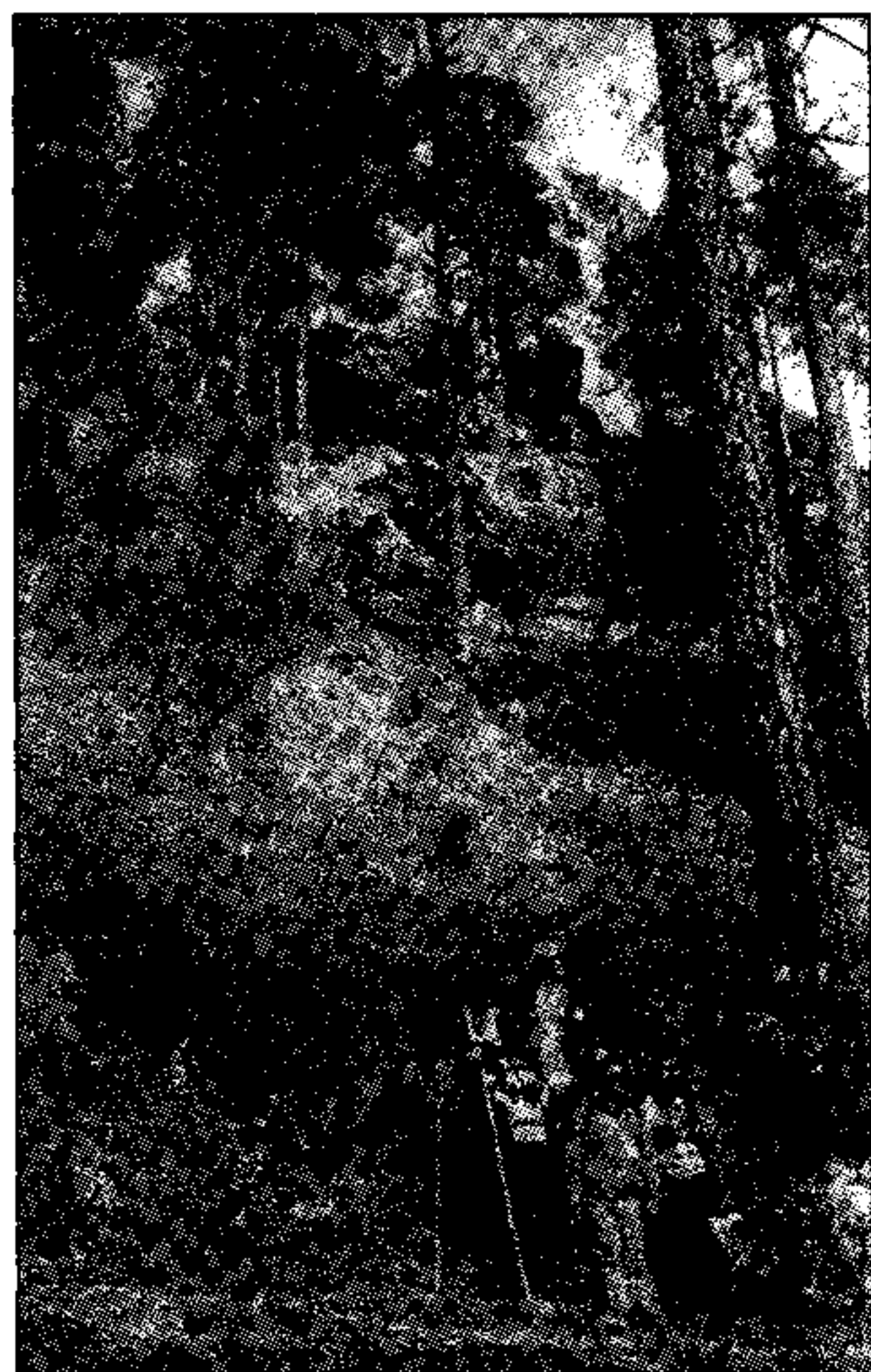
by the vehicular road but took the mountain path. The height, added to the difficulty of the path, told on our physique, and we were really tired. Devidhura is a town these days. There are a few devotees of Sri Ramakrishna here, of whom Sri Joshi is well known. After we had Devi Varahi's *darshan* we were relaxing over tea in a nearby hotel, when Sri Joshi came to meet us. He also fed us with fruits. Not only that, he accompanied us till the next village. Before leaving Devidhura, we had a group of admirers of Sri Ramakrishna meeting us, and saluting the two monks. That was winter holiday season, and students came running to receive books and photographs from us.

Soon we had reached Kedarnath village. From here, the weather was excellent. There was no trace of our previous night's weather-experience—not a drop of rain or snow anywhere. There was enough fun too on the way. One of our party, Deepak, began taking pho-



*Meditation at the Mournala dak bungalow*





*Some moments amidst sylvan surroundings*

tographs from a camera which unfortunately had no film roll in it at all! We came to know about his novel photography a little later, while we were sitting on the banks of Gars lake. All enjoyed the fun.

From there, we reached Pati village, where we had tea. We took the jungle path to reach Dhunaghat from Pati. When we were about to start our walk at Pati, we saw Swamis Somadevanandaji and Anubhavanandaji from Mayavati, coming with fruits and sweets to receive us. Swami Somadevanandaji inspired us with his beautiful words and quotable quotes. We used to divide ourselves into three batches: the cooking party would go ahead to get ready with hot water, food, etc; then came the second batch; and finally came the Bhava Prachar group. The last group had the task of distributing books and photographs. While doing this at Pati, the Bhava Prachar group was delayed. It was evening, and since we had taken the jungle track to reach Dhunaghat, we were

all worried as to why that group didn't reach Dhunaghat even hours after our reaching there. We thought they had lost the way, though we had a system of placing indications all through and they would certainly find them. At last they came. What had happened was, in the darkness, they had crossed the dak bungalow and had gone ahead. The two monks from Mayavati returned to Mayavati after seeing us safe and settled in the dak bungalow. The dak bungalow is two-storied, and Swamiji had stayed in the lower portion. These days, the upper portion belongs to the forest department. Some of us had to stay here.

The next day, 3rd January, we slept a little longer, and when we woke up, it was already late. We hurried with our preparations and started trekking at 7 am. We had to cover 14 km that day to reach Mayavati. The caretaker of that bungalow came forward to show us the way and came up to Mayavati. Swami Satyabodhanandaji inspired us to run for a while, and we did that with joy. When we reached Khetikhan, we saw that the local people had arranged for a welcome of sorts in a park. They had placed the photographs of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother, and Swamiji. They welcomed us warmly, offered milk, and later, tea. After this, our only idea was to reach Mayavati. Guided by the villagers collecting firewood in the jungle, we walked briskly, almost running along the forest path, and



*Almost near the destination: Near a small rivulet*



reached the area where Captain Sevier had been cremated. We rested there awhile, and after our constant source of inspiration, Swami Satyabodhanandaji, gave us a small talk about the rules of the Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, we began journeying once again. We heard the sound of firecrackers bursting, three gunshots, and blowing of conches as we approached the Ashrama.



*The final stretch: On reaching the Ashrama precincts*

Srimat Swami Mumukshanandaji Maharaj, President, Advaita Ashrama, Swami Muktinathanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Lucknow, Swami Ham-sanandaji, President, Vivekananda Ashrama, Shyamla Tal, and other monks were waiting to receive us. Led by Swami Satyabodhanandaji, we formed a line and entered the Ashrama. The Ashrama gate had been well-decorated with greens and some flowers (flowers are a rarity in winter and snow season, but leaves are still available). Swami Mumukshanandaji received us warmly, with a benelovent smile, by presenting small bouquets to all of us individually. He also ordered tea and snacks instantly.

At last, we had reached Mayavati, the dream centre of Swami Vivekananda. Though he is not there now, his spirit and spiritual presence, however, are certainly there. He loved Mayavati because he loved contemplative life. Of all the places, he had chosen such an inaccessible corner a century ago—away from the din and bustle of the world—because he wanted an isolated spot, silent and resonant of Advaita, suited for meditation. When we hear that this is becoming sort of a tourist attraction nowadays, we felt extremely sad. What an understanding of a beautiful ashrama!

We stayed here till the 7th morning and left by jeeps to Bareilly from where we re-

turned to Kolkata by train. Only Swami Satyabodhanandaji stayed back up to 18th, spending his time in meditation. All through our stay, we spent our precious time in meditation and other spiritual practices. A little talk, a whisper even, would disturb the calm of the place, we felt. In Mother Sevier's bungalow where we were put up, a small retreat was also conducted on 4th morning. We visited Dharamgarh, where Swamiji wanted an ashrama to be established.

Swami Satyabodhanandaji started from Mayavati on the 18th as Swami Vivekananda had done, went by walk up to Champawat, and stayed there overnight in a dak bungalow. He was accompanied by Swami Ramatmanandaji from Mayavati. At Champawat, a small function had been arranged to mark the centenary of Swamiji's visit. From Champawat, the swamis left for Chalthi by the jungle path, where they stayed at the forest officer's rest house on the 19th night. A local gentleman fed the party free of charge. The next day at Dhaun village, a shopkeeper allowed the swamis to eat whatever they wished, but said no to money. On 20th, the swamis left Chalthi, and went to Tanakpur. At Tanakpur, the bus conductor and driver halted the bus for a full half hour until the swamis had their lunch near by. Thus came to an end the centenary walk. □



# What We Do At Home

*In response to our request to readers to present their personal experiences about how they train their children in morality, religion and spirituality in this modern age, we received some very good letters. However, as we had expected, the response wasn't as it was on earlier occasions. But we never meant that the television should be banned from homes; we only wanted to know how, in spite of its invasion and in spite of the computer age, parents are instilling moral values. The present-day situation is frightening. It is absolutely necessary for all parents to make their children read great works like the Ramayana and Mahabharata, chant some Upanishadic and Gita verses everyday, read religious books, and spend at least 15 minutes twice daily before the family shrine in prayer and contemplation. If not, the future citizens are going to be a terrible problem for the nation. Though all responses were good, we publish only some practical, subjective ones here.*

**Sri Chinmoyee Prasanna Ghosh**, Midnapore: 'As a father and guardian of two kids, nay, of two future citizens, I feel the urgent need of instilling some moral and spiritual values in them. Keeping myself aloof from the dirty game of politics, I engage myself deeply in the game of "Being and Making". I make my children pray, "*asato mā sadgamaya*" etc, daily. We tell them inspiring stories. They are given children's books containing epic and scriptural stories.'

**Sri Rajeev Kumar Gaur**, New Delhi: 'First it was I who made it a point to visit the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, and then brought my two sons in contact with the Mission library. Slowly and steadily, their exposure to various inspiring books shifted their focus from TV (I never had a cable connection) to their studies. This helped them achieve very good results and both got very high percentage. When I recently asked my younger son if he wanted a cable connection, he said that he didn't want to be disturbed.'

**Sri V. Ramamurthy**, Tumkur: 'I as a grandfather try to see that all the family members are performing their spiritual duties at home. We see some good cultural programmes, no doubt, but there's an urgent need for the religious heads and the government to find out methods for the optimum use of the media for the propagation of human

values.'

**Sri M. Reddaiah Raju**, T. Narasipur: 'We, the parents, must be shining examples to our children, and so we get up early in the morning, practise *asanas*, meditation, self-study of inspiring books, music, etc. Children definitely follow what we actually practise but not what we preach routinely.'

**Sri R. Bhavani Shankar**, Bangalore: 'We have a separate room, used only for study, prayer and meditation. We have regular worship and follow almost the same routine as the local Ramakrishna centre does. My son and daughter took active part in all this, and both are well-placed in life today.'

**Sri Samir Bakshi**, Hooghly: 'We all know that a place of worship is the house of God. Today, as living in a temple is not possible, our house has become similar to a temple. The study of holy books along with prayer etc, are done regularly here.'

**Sri B.K. Mittal**, Rishikesh: 'We, husband and wife, have chosen the *vanaprastha* way of life and have been living at Rishikesh since our retirement. We devote our time to reading scriptures, contemplation, japa, and meditation. Our association with our grandchildren is when they visit us along with their parents. They too are inspired by our way of life and our discussions mostly centre around why people go to temples, why one should medi-



tate, who is God, etc. Our grandchildren, inspired by their parents, are serious-minded and write thoughtful articles in their school magazines.'

**Sri Indrajit Ganguli**, Eppstein, Germany: 'Our son grew up seeing that his parents spend a good part of their time reading religious books and magazines. This naturally inspired him to follow us. I would often read from the *Gita* and explain verses to him.'

**Sri L. Ramraj**, Mysore: 'Both at morning and evening, prayer songs are played at home. I perform *sandhya*, followed by meditation. Food is offered and partaken. Moral stories are regularly told. A small library of religious books is maintained. We visit temples regularly. Television programmes like quiz, music, sports are allowed. We tell our children that our house should be like a temple. Sports and games are encouraged.'

**Sri Parashuram Ram**, Gumla: 'We get up early in the morning and ask our children to leave bed before sunrise, sit down and recite God's names. We also ask them to read stories for children, published by the Gita Press, Advaita Ashrama, etc. Viewing the TV is restricted to only one hour in the morning when *Satsanga* is telecast, and one in the evening when comic serials are shown. We take our children on pilgrimage and to visit holy shrines whenever the occasion arises.'

**Sri K. Krishna Prasad**, Hyderabad: 'We

parents were finding some free time daily, at all costs, to engage ourselves in intimate interaction with our children on topics like value-based education, and the role of spirituality in life. We encouraged them to read spiritual literature, lives of the Buddha, Shankara, Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda. Our advice to them to participate in personality-development courses and in sports helped them in a big way.'

**Sri Raman Dharmalingam**, Nilgiris: 'As a former student of Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore, I have immense faith in moral and spiritual life. Consequently, I have tried to follow the right path of moral behaviour, and the regular practice of prayer, meditation, and reading from the *Gita* and spiritual books. This was adopted by my two children also. Both of them are now well-placed in society.'

**Sri Kanubhai Mandavia**, Ahmedabad: 'My wife and I always believed that we have a definite duty towards our children, and undertook many actions like praying together at evening, and having joint discourses on the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, *Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master*, etc before going to bed. The TV and other gadgets were used sparingly. Our children are initiated disciples of the Ramakrishna Order, and maintain a close touch with many swamijis.' □

#### *A Few Other Good Respondents*

**Sri Abhijit Baidya**, 24 Parganas (South); **Sri Bishnu Sankar Verma**, c/o 99 APO; **Sri Bishnupada Pal**, Barrackpore; **Sri Dilip Kumar Nath**, Hooghly; **Sri Gour Gopal Bhuniya**, Midnapore; **Ms Madhumita Ghose**, Kolkata; **Sri O.N. Bhat Kuthari**, Jammu; **Dr S.B. Purohit**, Pali-Marwar; **Sri Shiv Das Kashyap**, Bareilly; **Sri K. Sairaman**, Hosur; **Mrs Nalini Bhat**, Mangalore; **Sri Sudhanshu Shekhar Sircar**, New Delhi; **Sri Mahesh J. Ursekar**, Mumbai; **Sri V.B. Shastry**, Bhubaneswar.

*'Blessed indeed is the householder who performs his duties in the world, at the same time cherishing love for the Lotus Feet of God. He is indeed a hero.... One cannot lead such a life without great spiritual power,' says Sri Ramakrishna.*





## The Great Devotee - 2

We were discussing Keshava Iyengar's life. When Keshava didn't seem to care for anything—even his wife Soumya Nayaki, his father decided to take a drastic step.

One night, while Keshava was in his room, he pushed Soumya Nayaki in and bolted it from outside. As soon as this happened, Keshava read the motive and sat like a stone in meditation. He didn't stir till it was morning, when the sound of unlocking the room was heard. Keshava got up from meditation, didn't even notice the terrified wife standing in the corner of the room, and as if nothing had happened, walked straight towards the river for his usual bath.

When her parents-in-law heard about Keshava's whole-night meditation and Soumya Nayaki's standing in the corner all night, they decided to leave their son alone. 'Incorrigible,' was all that they could say in great anger. When news began to reach the girl's parents, they were extremely worried that they had given their girl in marriage to a madman. They too visited Keshava's house once or twice in order to read the situation for themselves. They saw their daughter toiling with a put-on smiling face since early morning till late at night. People around said that Keshava was slightly mad, if not fully. What they saw convinced them that their son-in-law was sort of a vagabond, happy to live a haggard life in the temple rather than live a respectable householder's life.

Soon Keshava Iyengar's parents died. That was one more shock to the orphaned Soumya Nayaki. Keshava became still more aloof. Even though she tried her best to be calm, she couldn't. When she found nothing to eat at all, when the women of the entire locality began to taunt her, she decided to quit. She ran away to her father's home. What could

her parents, already impoverished, do but return their daughter to their son-in-law's house? 'It's your fate and we can't help it,' was all the advice they gave to their daughter. As a last attempt, they tried to convince Keshava but in vain. He wasn't available for talks at all!

The girls and women of her locality became her mock sympathizers, and taunters. The language people use sometimes is sharper than the sharpest blade: it cuts through the heart as through a lump of butter. When Soumya Nayaki began to be tortured in this way, she understood that the only way was to catch hold of her husband's feet. If Keshava was really a devotee of God as the girl herself—who too was a hidden devotee—understood, he can't be brutish in his behaviour. She firmly decided one day that that evening she would discuss her life with her husband.

So that evening when Keshava Iyengar returned home, the lady fell at his feet and shed torrential tears. 'Why are you weeping like this?' were his first words to his wife after years of marriage. Soumya Nayaki replied: 'It has become unbearable to me, even though I have tried all these years not to disturb you in the least. You've never uttered a single word! I don't think it could be a sin if you spoke to me? The only thing I desire now is to serve your holy feet, nothing else. I've become the talk of the town and the words I've to hear have pierced my heart. I don't know what to do. Please be kind enough to accept my humble service. Please be gracious enough to show me the way.'

It perhaps dawned on Keshava that he had been too, too cruel towards the poor girl. So he said: 'You see, my life is different. I can't lead a normal life. It was against my wishes that you were brought here. Know that I don't hate you. I am an aspirant, seeking God...'



'What could be more joyful for me than be your servant and aid in this holy venture? Please bless me that I too could have some of your yearning,' said the pious woman, still lying at his feet. Keshava said, 'I have read that Lord Keshava is easily moved if women weep for Him. When Draupadi wept, Krishna ran to save the Pandavas from the anger of Durvasa. So you too can weep for God. Weep for Him, and let's see if He becomes gracious to both of us. From today, you too can come to the temple and spend your time in prayer.'

What could be more joyous for poor Soumya Nayaki than hearing her husband's words after years of marriage? What could be more joyous than hearing that it wouldn't be disturbance to him if she followed him to the temple?

It's not known if God has a partiality for women, but not even a year had gone by since Soumya Nayaki began her 'new' life, worshipping, shedding tears, and praying to Lord Keshava in that Belur temple, when one evening, when everything was dark outside, when there were only a few oil lamps lit in the beautiful temple, the Lord showed Himself with four arms to her, and addressed her as 'Sister'. The lady prayed still more fervently and within days, the Lord appeared before his ardent devotee, Keshava Iyengar. 'Keshava,' said the Lord sweetly, 'your desire has been fulfilled. Now take care of Sister. Give up this terrible austerity. I shall accept your services, and as you have wished, you can be my friend and servant.' The divine hands embraced Keshava warmly. Years of struggle, years of meditation, years of prayer were all fulfilled that solemn moment. Krishna said: 'Look after Sister. She has suffered greatly.'

That evening, Keshava Iyengar called himself Vaikuntha Keshava or Vaikuntha Dasa. The surname 'Iyengar' was given up. Vaikuntha Dasa became a famous minstrel of God, a contemporary of Purandara Dasa, and began composing soul-stirring songs in praise of the Lord. His wife Soumya Nayaki too enjoyed numerous visions of the Lord, and became a sister to Him, serving Him to her

heart's content, though in secret.

Things changed gradually. Those very people who would criticize Keshava as a madman became his ardent admirers. Vaikuntha Dasa too came to respect his wife as a devotee of rare calibre. People frequented his house and sought his guidance in many matters. The temple people would never begin their worship unless Vaikuntha Dasa came there. Of all the people, a boy by name Varada became the Dasa's disciple, stayed with him, and served him always. He would keep record of the devotional songs that his master composed.

Lord Keshava also 'changed', in the sense that, instead of being just a Master to his servant, he wished to be a child and seek the love of this rare couple. So it was that both Vaikuntha Dasa and Soumya Nayaki became in loco parentis to Baby Krishna, feeding Him, putting Him to bed, singing songs to Him, tolerating His naughty deeds, etc. The Lord's desire to play with His devotees never seems to end. He would invent innumerable pranks to play with this devotee-couple.

Once Vaikuntha Dasa had a desire to donate a few cows to some brahmins of the town. He somehow managed to earn the money necessary, and bought four or five cows. And he sent Varada towards evening with the instruction that the boy should invite as many poor brahmins as he could to his house to receive the cows. Varada knew that poor brahmins were mostly living in distant villages, and so he went to invite them. Within no time, the brahmins began to come one by one. With great delight, Vaikuntha Dasa donated a cow each to the brahmins. They blessed the couple heartily and went away. When all the cows were thus given away, Vaikuntha entered the house happily and slept in peace.

The next morning he took bath early, went to the temple and waited for it to open. Soon the priest came, bowed down to Vaikuntha Dasa, and opened the temple. What he saw in the sanctum sanctorum stunned the priest!

*(to be concluded)*



# Book Review

**YOGA SASTRA—THE SCIENCE OF EXPERIENCING NIRVANA: By Dr G.K. Pungalia.**  
**Published by Yoga and Allied Research Institute, Bhosale Heights, Top Floor, Fergusson College Road, Shivaji Nagar, Pune 411005. 1999. Pp. xx+478. Rs. 395.**

As long as there is life the mystery surrounding it will always have people asking questions. The promise of yoga to unlock these mysteries has therefore attracted a good deal of attention and popularity down the ages. The present growing interest in yoga is also fuelled partially by translations of ancient texts into various languages, especially English, and the proliferation of teachers.

Yoga is one of the six orthodox systems of Indian philosophy. It has, however, one speciality and that is, apart from its philosophy, its various yogic practices are in some form or other adopted by other orthodox and unorthodox schools. That is another reason for its wide acclaim.

The present book, *Yoga Sastra*, should not be confused with the popular system of Patanjala yoga. This is the outcome of a thesis written by the author under the able guidance of Dr Saroja Bhate. The book is based on the work of Hemachandra, a Jaina acharya of the Svetambara sect. This venerable acharya was a contemporary of King Kumarpala of Gujarat, who reigned in 1100 AD, and at whose request it was written. The original book, also of the same title, contains 1012 stanzas, and a commentary running into 12,750 stanzas, also written by Hemachandra himself.

The author, apart from his scholastic ability in Jain scriptures, appears to have a good grasp of various Hindu scriptures and has used them at times to clarify certain ideas. Other contemporary forms of yoga are also dealt with in various chapters. Being an eager student of science, he has tried to rationally explain certain doctrines and practices suited to the present-day context. The book contains 12 chapters, and the author has critically studied and translated them while giving parallel references and finally summing up in some places with his personal views.

A keen student of Indian philosophy will, however, find some glaring errors in the basic concepts.

For instance, in the Introduction, it is said that a perfected yogi is nothing but Ishwara. Patanjali's yoga sutra referred to is: *kleśa-karma-vipāka-āśayair-aparāmr̥ṣṭaḥ puruṣa-viśeṣa īśvaraḥ* (1.24), which is not the meaning that the author gives. This is the danger that modern translators fall into, because they have not studied these things traditionally; there is sometimes the tendency to interpret ideas not in keeping with the spirit intended.

It goes without saying that yoga as delineated by Patanjali and the later Buddhist meditation techniques have greatly influenced later yoga philosophies and teachings. Hemachandra is no exception. He has, however, in his treatise *Yoga Sastra* gone into a few more details, naturally from the Jain philosophical and religious standpoints.

The first four chapters deal with Jaina yoga system, analysis of the external and internal worlds according to it, karma, bondage, the obstacles to be removed through morality and ethics, etc. The 5th and 6th chapters deal with Pranayama and Pratyahara. From the 7th chapter till the end Hemachandra deals with the various meditations according to Jainism. Hemachandra has not written anything on what yoga is really about. His contention is that the preceding states, if diligently followed by the aspirant, will automatically lead him to the goal. He has narrated his personal experiences in the last chapter.

Dr Pungaliya has followed Hemachandra closely, but has inserted sub-chapters in order to make certain teachings clear. Though no separate mention has been made of Hemachandra's commentary, it is presumed that the author has taken its help adequately. A couple of chapters dealing with the meditation practices of teachers like Maharshi Mahesh Yogi, Rajneesh and so on have also been included. Some photographs of yogic postures have been added. A little more work on the book in its future edition—careful editing, precision in italicization, a thorough pre-publication reading by scholars—will make it a brilliant addition to yoga literature.

Sri Pungaliya's work is worth appreciating and we congratulate the author for his painstaking efforts.

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